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THE ENGLISH STAGE

THE ENGLISH STAGE

*Being an Account of
the Victorian Drama
by Augustin Filon*

Translated from the French
by Frederic Whyte with
an Introduction by
Henry Arthur Jones

KENNIKAT PRESS
Port Washington, N. Y./London

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THE ENGLISH STAGE

First published in 1897

Reissued in 1970 by Kennikat Press

Library of Congress Catalog Card No: 71-102846

SBN 3046-0753-2

Manufactured by Taylor Publishing Company Dallas, Texas

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INTRODUCTION

BY HENRY ARTHUR JONES

I HAVE rarely had a more welcome task than that of saying a few words of introduction to the following essays, and of heartily commending them to the English reading public. I am not called upon, nor would it become me, to recriticise the criticism of the English drama they contain, to reargue any of the issues raised, or to vent my own opinions of the persons and plays hereafter dealt with. My business is to thank M. Filon for bringing us before the notice of the French public, to speak of his work as a whole rather than to discuss it in detail, and to define his position in relation to the recent dramatic movement in our country.

But before addressing myself to these main ends, I may perhaps be allowed to call attention to one or two striking passages and individual judgments. The picture in the first chapter of the old actor's life on circuit is capitally done. I do not know where to look for so animated and succinct a rendering of that phase of past theatrical life. And the pilgrimage to the deserted Prince of Wales's Theatre also left a vivid impression on me, perhaps quickened by my own early memories.

In all that relates to the early Victorian drama M. Filon seems to me a sure and penetrating guide. All lovers of the English drama, as distinguished from that totally different and in many ways antagonistic institution, the English theatre, must be pleased to see M. Filon stripping the spangles from Bulwer Lytton. To this day Lytton remains an idol of English playgoers and actors, a lasting proof of their inability to distinguish what is dramatic truth. *The Lady of Lyons* and *Richelieu* still rank in many theatrical circles with *Hamlet* as masterpieces of the "legitimate," and *Money* is still bracketed with *The School for Scandal*. It is benevolent of M. Filon to write dramatic criticism about a nation where such notions have prevailed for half a century.

The criticism on Tennyson as a playwright seems to me equally admirable with the criticism on Bulwer Lytton, and all the more admirable when the two are read in conjunction. Doubtless Tennyson will never be so successful on the boards as Lytton has been. *Becket* is a loose and ill-made play in many respects, and succeeded with the public only because Irving was able to pull it into some kind of unity by buckling it round his great impersonation of the archbishop. But *Becket* contains great things, and is a real addition to our dramatic literature. It would have been a thousand pities if it had failed. On the other hand, the success of Lytton's plays has been a real misfortune to our drama. You cannot have

two standards of taste in dramatic poetry. Just as surely as the circulation of bad money in a country drives out all the good, so surely does a base and counterfeit currency in art drive out all finer and higher things that contend with it. In his measurement of those two ancient enemies, Tennyson and Lytton, M. Filon has shown a rare power of understanding us and of entering into the spirit of our nineteenth-century poetic drama.

If I may be allowed a word of partial dissent from M. Filon, I would say that he assigns too much space and influence to Robertson. Robertson did one great thing: he drew the great and vital tragi-comic figure of Eccles. He drew many other pleasing characters and scenes, most of them as essentially false as the falsities and theatricalities he supposed himself to be superseding. I shall be reminded that in the volume before us M. Filon says that all reforms of the drama pretend to be a return to nature and to truth. I have elsewhere shown that there is no such thing as being consistently and realistically "true to nature" on the stage. *Hamlet* in many respects is farther away from real life than the shallowest and emptiest farce. It is in the seizure and presentation of the essential and distinguishing marks of a character, of a scene, of a passion, of a society, of a phase of life, of a movement of national thought—it is in the seizure and vivid treatment of some of these, to the exclusion or falsification of non-essentials, that the dramatist must lay his claim to sincerity and being "true to nature." And it

seems to me that one has only to compare *Caste*, the typical comedy of an English *mésalliance*, with *Le Gendre de M. Poirier*, the typical comedy of a French *mésalliance*, to come to the conclusion that in the foundation and conduct of his story Robertson was false and theatrical—theatrical, that is, in the employment of a social contrast that was effective on the stage, but well-nigh, if not quite, impossible in life.

It is of the smallest moment to be “true to nature” in such mint and cummin of the stage as the shutting of a door with a real lock, in the observation of niceties of expression and behaviour, in the careful copying of little fleeting modes and gestures, in the introduction of certain realistic bits of business—it is, I say, of the smallest moment to be “true to nature” in these, if the playwright is false to nature in all the great verities of the heart and spirit of man, if his work as a whole leaves the final impression that the vast, unimaginable drama of human life is as petty and meaningless and empty as our own English theatre. A fair way to measure any dramatist is to ask this question of his work: “Does he make human life as small as his own theatre, so that there is nothing more to be said about either; or does he hint that human life so far transcends any theatre that all attempts to deal with it on the boards, even the highest, even Hamlet, even *Œdipus*, even Faust, are but shadows and guesses and perishable toys of the stage?”

Robertson has nothing to say to us in 1896.

He drew one great character and many pleasing ones in puerile, impossible schemes, without relation to any larger world than the very narrow English theatrical world of 1865-70.

In his analysis of the influence of Ibsen in England and France, M. Filon seems to touch the right note. I may perhaps be permitted a word of personal explanation in this connection. When I came up to London sixteen years ago, to try for a place among English playwrights, a rough translation from the German version of *The Dolls' House* was put into my hands, and I was told that if it could be turned into a sympathetic play, a ready opening would be found for it on the London boards. I knew nothing of Ibsen, but I knew a great deal of Robertson and H. J. Byron. From these circumstances came the adaptation called *Breaking a Butterfly*. I pray it may be forgotten from this time, or remembered only with leniency amongst other transgressions of my dramatic youth and ignorance.

I pass on to speak of M. Filon's work as a whole. For a generation or two past France has held the lead, and rightly held the lead, in the European theatre. She has done this by virtue of a peculiar innate dramatic instinct in her people ; by virtue of great traditions and thorough methods of training ; by virtue of national recognition of her dramatists and actors, and national pride in them ; and by virtue of the freedom she has allowed to her playwrights. So far as they have abused that freedom, so far as they have become the mere purveyors of

sexual eccentricity and perversity, so far the French drama has declined. So cunningly economic is Nature, she will slip in her moral by hook or by crook. There cannot be an intellectual effort in any province of art without a moral implication.

But France, though her great band of playwrights is broken up, still lords it over the European drama, or rather, over the European theatre. There is still a feeling among our upper-class English audiences that a play, an author, an actor and actress, are good *because* they are French. There is, or has been, a sound reason for that feeling. And there is still, as M. Filon says in his Preface, a corresponding feeling in France that "there is no such thing as an English drama." There has been an equally sound reason for that feeling. M. Filon has done us the great kindness of trying to remove it. We still feel very shy in coming before our French neighbours, like humble, honest, poor relations who are getting on a little in the world, and would like to have a nod from our aristocratic kinsfolk. We are uneasy about the reception we shall meet, and nervous and diffident in making our bow to the French public. A nod from our aristocratic relations, a recognition from France, might be of so much use in our parish here at home. For in all matters of the modern drama England is no better than a parish, with "porochial" judgments, "porochial" instincts, and "porochial" ways of looking at things. There is not a breath of national sentiment, a breath of national feeling,

of width of view, in the way English playgoers regard their drama.

M. Filon has sketched in the following pages the history of the recent dramatic movement in England. If I were asked what was the distinguishing mark of that movement, I should say that during the years when it was in progress there was a steadfast and growing attempt to treat the great realities of our modern life upon our stage, to bring our drama into relation with our literature, our religion, our art, and our science, and to make it reflect the main movements of our national thought and character. That anything great or permanent was accomplished I am the last to claim; all was crude, confused, tentative, aspiring. But there was *life* in it. Again I shall be reminded that dramatic reformers always pretend that they return to nature and truth, and are generally found out by the next generation to be stale and theatrical impostors. But if anyone will take the trouble to examine the leading English plays of the last ten years, and will compare them with the *serious* plays of our country during the last three centuries, I shall be mistaken if he will not find evidence of the beginnings, the first shoots of an English drama of greater import and vitality and of wider aim than any school of drama the English theatre has known since the Elizabethans. The brilliant Restoration comedy makes no pretence to be a national drama: neither do the comedies of Sheridan and Goldsmith. There was no possi-

bility of a great national English drama between Milton and the French Revolution, any more than there was the possibility of a great school of English poetry. And the feelings that were let loose after the convulsions of 1793 did not in England run in the direction of the drama. It is only within the present generation that great masses of Englishmen have begun to frequent the theatre. And as our vast city population began to get into a habit of playgoing, and our theatres became more crowded, it seemed not too much to hope that a school of English drama might be developed amongst us, and that we might induce more and more of our theatre-goers to find their pleasure in seeing their lives portrayed at the theatre, rather than in running to the theatre to escape from their lives.

After considerable advances had been made in this direction, the movement became obscured and burlesqued, and finally the British public fell into what Macaulay calls one of its periodical panics of morality. In that panic the English drama disappeared for the time, and at the moment of writing it does not exist. There are many excellent entertainments at our different theatres, and most of them are deservedly successful. But in the very height of this theatrical season there is not a single London theatre that is giving a play that so much as pretends to picture our modern English life,—I might almost say that pretends to picture human life at all. I have not a word to say against these various entertainments.

I have been delighted with some of them, and heartily welcome their success. But what has become of the English drama that M. Filon has given so many of the following pages to discuss and dissect? I wish M. Filon would devote another article in the *Revue des deux Mondes* to explain to his countrymen what has taken place in the English theatre since his articles were written. It needs a Frenchman to explain, and a French audience to understand, the full comedy of the situation.

For ten years the English theatre-going public had been led to take an increasing interest in their national drama,—I mean the drama as a picture of life in opposition to a funny theatrical entertainment,—and during those ten years that drama had grown in strength of purpose, in largeness of aim, in vividness of character-painting, in every quality that promised England a living school of drama. It began to deal with the great realities of modern English life. It was pressing on to be a real force in the spiritual and intellectual life of the nation. It began to attract the attention of Europe. But it became entangled with another movement, got caught in the skirts of the sexual-pessimistic blizzard sweeping over North Europe, was confounded with it, and was execrated and condemned without examination. I say without examination. Let anyone turn to the *Times* of November 1894, and read the correspondence which began the assault on the modern school of English drama. Let him

discover, if he can, in the letters of those who attacked it, what notions they had as to the relations of morality to the drama. It will interest M. Filon's countrymen to know that British playwrights were condemned in the interests of British morality. And when one tried to find out what particular sort of morality the English public was trying to teach its dramatists, one discovered at last that it was precisely that system of morality which is practised amongst wax dolls. Not the broad, genial, worldly morality of Shakespeare; not the deep, devious, confused, but most human morality of the Bible; not a high, severe, ascetic morality; not even a sour, grim, puritanic morality. No! let any candid inquirer search into this matter and try to get at the truth of it, and ask what has been the recent demand of the English public in this matter, and he will find it is for a wax-doll morality.

Now, there is much to be said for the establishment of a system of wax-doll morality, not only on the English stage, but also in the world at large. And all of us who have properly-regulated minds must regret that, through some unaccountable oversight, it did not occur to Providence to carry on the due progress and succession of the human species by means of some such system.

I say it must have been an oversight. For can we doubt that, had this excellent method suggested itself, it would have been instantly adopted? Can we suppose that Providence would have deliberately rejected so sweetly pretty and simple an

expedient for putting a stop to immorality, not only on the English stage to-day, but everywhere and always?

I know there is a real dilemma. But surely those of us who are truly reverent will suspect Providence of a little nodding and negligence in this matter, rather than of virtual complicity with immorality — for that is what the alternate hypothesis amounts to.

But seeing that, by reason of this lamentable oversight of Providence, English life is not sustained and renewed by means of wax-doll morality, what is a poor playwright to do? I am quite aware that what is going on in English life has nothing whatever to do with what is going on at the English theatres in the autumn of 1896. Still, like Caleb Plummer, in a matter of this kind one would like to get "as near natur' as possible," or, at least, not to falsify and improve her beyond all chance of recognition. I hope I shall not be accused of any feeling of enmity against wax-doll morality in the abstract. I think it a most excellent, nay, a perfect theory of morals. The more I consider it, the more eloquent I could grow in its favour. I do not mean to practise it myself, but I do most cordially recommend it to all my neighbours.

To return. The correspondence in the *Times* showed scarcely a suspicion that morality on the stage meant anything else than shutting one's eyes alike to facts and to truth, and making one's characters behave like wax dolls. As to the

bent and purpose of the dramatist, there was so little of the dramatic sense abroad, that an act of a play which was written to ridicule the detestable, cheap, paradoxical affectations of vice and immorality current among a certain section of society was censured as being an attempt to *copy* the thing it was *satirising*! So impossible is it to get the average Englishman to distinguish for a moment between the dramatist and his characters. The one notion that the public got into its head was that we were a set of gloomy corrupters of youth, and it hooted accordingly. Now, I do not deny that many undesirable things, many things to regret, many extreme things, and some few unclean things, fastened upon the recent dramatic movement. And so far as it had morbid issues, so far as it tended merely to distress and confuse, so far as it painted vice and ugliness for their own sakes, so far it was rightly and inevitably condemned, nay, so far it condemned and destroyed itself. But these, I maintain, were side-tendencies. They were not the essence of the movement. They were the extravagances and confusions that always attend a revival, whether in art or religion. And by the general public, who can never get but one idea, and never more than one side of that idea, into its head at a time, these extravagances and side-shoots are taken for the very heart of the movement.

Take the Oxford movement. Did the great British public get a glimmer of Newman's lofty idea of the continual indwelling miraculous spiritual

force of the Church? No. It got a notion into its head that a set of rabid, dishonest bigots were trying to violate the purity of its Protestant religion, so it hooted and howled, stamped upon the movement, and went back to hug the sallow corpse of Evangelicalism for another quarter of a century. The movement was thought to be killed. But it was only scotched, and it is the one living force in the English Church to-day.

Take, again, the æsthetic movement. Did the great British public get a glimmer of William Morris's lofty idea of making every home in England beautiful? No. It got a notion into its head that a set of idiotic fops had gone crazy in worship of sunflowers; so it giggled and derided, and went back to its geometric-patterned Brussels carpets, its flock wall-papers, and all the damnable trumpery of Tottenham Court Road. The movement was thought to be killed, but it was only scotched; and whatever beauty there is in English interiors, whatever advance has been made in decorating our homes, is due to that movement. Again, to compare small things with great, in the recent attempt to give England a living national drama, we have been judged not upon the essence of the matter, but upon certain extravagances and side-tendencies. The great public got a notion into its head that a set of gloomy, vicious persons had conspired to corrupt the youth of our nation by writing immoral plays. And the untimely accident of a notorious prosecution giving some colour to the opinion, no further examination was

made of the matter. A clean sweep was made of the whole business, and a rigid system of wax-doll morality established forthwith, so far, that is, as the modern prose drama is concerned. But this wax-doll morality is only enforced against the serious drama of modern life. It is not enforced against farce, or musical comedy. It is only the serious dramatist who has been gagged and handcuffed. Adultery is still an excellent joke in a farce, provided it is conveyed by winks and nods. The whole body of a musical entertainment may reek with cockney indecency and witlessness, and yet no English mother will sniff offence, provided it is covered up with dances and songs. I repeat that if a thorough examination is made of the matter, it will be found that the recent movement has been judged upon a small side-issue.

We may hope that the English translation of M. Filon's work will do something to reinstate us in the good opinion of our countrymen. I think, if his readers will take his cue that during the last few years there has been an earnest attempt on the part of a few writers to establish a living English drama, that is, a drama which within necessary limitations and conventions sets out with a determination to see English life as it really is and to paint English men and women as they really are—I think if playgoers will take that cue from M. Filon, they will get a better notion of the truth of the case than if they still regard us as gloomy and perverse corrupters of English youth.

A passage from George Meredith may perhaps serve to indicate the position of the English drama at the present moment, and to point in what direction its energies should lie when the gags and handcuffs are removed, and the stiffness gets out of its joints. At the opening of *Diana of the Crossways* these memorable words occur :—

“Then, ah! then, moreover, will the novelist’s art (and the dramatist’s), now neither blushless infant nor executive man, have attained its majority. We can then be veraciously historical, honestly transcriptive. Rose-pink and dirty drab will alike have passed away. Philosophy is the foe of both, and their silly cancelling contest, perpetually renewed in a shuffle of extremes, as it always is where a phantasm falseness reigns, will no longer baffle the contemplation of natural flesh, smother no longer the soul issuing out of our incessant strife. Philosophy bids us to see that we are not so pretty as rose-pink, not so repulsive as dirty drab; and that, instead of everlastingly shifting those barren aspects, the sight of ourselves is wholesome, bearable, fructifying, finally a delight. Do but perceive that we are coming to philosophy, the stride toward it will be a giant’s—a century a day. And imagine the celestial refreshment of having a pure decency in the place of sham; real flesh; a soul born active, wind-beaten, but ascending. Honourable will fiction (and the drama) then appear; honourable, a fount of life, an aid to life, quick with our blood. Why, when you

behold it you love it, — and you will not encourage it?—or only when presented by dead hands? Worse than that alternative dirty drab, your recurring rose-pink is rebuked by hideous revelations of the filthy foul; for nature will force her way, and if you try to stifle her by drowning she comes up, not the fairest part of her uppermost! Peruse your Realists—really your castigators, for not having yet embraced philosophy. As she grows in the flesh when discreetly tended, nature is unimpeachable, flower-like, yet not too decoratively a flower; you must have her with the stem, the thorns, the roots, and the fat bedding of roses. In this fashion she grew, says historical fiction; thus does she flourish now, would say the modern transcript, reading the inner as well as exhibiting the outer.

“And how may you know that you have reached to philosophy? You touch her skirts when you share her hatred of the sham decent, her derision of sentimentalism. You are one with her when—but I would not have you a thousand years older! Get to her, if in no other way, by the sentimental route:—that very winding path, which again and again brings you round to the point of original impetus, where you have to be unwound for another whirl; your point of original impetus being the grossly material, not at all the spiritual. It is most true that sentimentalism springs from the former, merely and badly aping the latter;—fine flower, or pinnacle flame-spire, of sensualism that it is, could it do other?—and accompanying

the former it traverses tracks of desert, here and there couching in a garden, catching with one hand at fruits, with another at colours; imagining a secret ahead, and goaded by an appetite sustained by sheer gratifications. Fiddle in harmonics as it may, it will have these gratifications at all costs. Should none be discoverable, at once you are at the Cave of Despair, beneath the funeral orb of Glaucoma, in the thick midst of poinarded, slit-throat, rope-dependent figures, placarded across the bosom Disillusioned, Infidel, Agnostic, Miserrimus. That is the sentimental route to advancement. Spirituality does not light it; evanescent dreams are its oil-lamps, often with wick askant in the socket.

"A thousand years! You may count full many a thousand by this route before you are one with divine philosophy. Whereas a single flight of brains will reach and embrace her; give you the savour of Truth, the right use of the senses, REALITY'S INFINITE SWEETNESS; for these things are in philosophy; and the fiction (and drama) which is the summary of actual Life, the within and without of us, is, prose or verse, plodding or soaring, philosophy's elect handmaiden."

"Dirty drab and rose-pink, with their silly cancelling contest"—does not that sum up the English drama of the last few years? There was certainly a shade too much dirty drab outside a while back, but within there was *life*. What life is there in the drama that has followed? Where does it paint one living English character?

Where does it touch one single interest of our present life, one single concern of man's body, soul, or spirit? What have these rose-pink revels of wax dolls to do with the immense, tragic, incoherent Babel around us, with all its multifold interests, passions, beliefs, and aspirations? When will philosophy come to our aid and depose this silly rose-pink wax-doll morality?

"But," says the British mother, "I must have plays that I can take my daughters to see."

"Quite so, my dear ma'am, and so you shall. But do you let your daughters read the Bible? The great realities of life are there handled in a far plainer and more outrageous way than they are ever handled on the English stage, and yet I cannot bring myself to think that the Bible has had a corrupt influence on the youth of our nation. Do you let them read Shakespeare? Again there is the freest handling of all these subjects, and again I cannot think that Shakespeare is a corrupter of English youth."

The question of verbal indecency or grossness has really very little to do with the matter. A few centuries ago English gentlewomen habitually used words and spoke of matters in a way that would be considered disgusting in a smoking-room to-day. We may be very glad to have outgrown the verbal coarseness of former generations. But we are not on that account to plume ourselves on being the more moral. It is a matter of taste and custom, not of morality.

The real knot of the question is in the method

of treating the great passions of humanity. If the English public sticks to its present decision that these passions are not to be handled at all, then no drama is possible. We shall continue our revels of wax dolls, and our theatres will provide entertainments, not drama. I do not shut my eyes to the fact that many of the greatest concerns of human life lie, to a great extent, outside the sexual question; and many great plays have been, and can be, written without touching upon these matters at all. But the general public will have none of them. The general public demands a love-story, and insists that it shall be the main interest of the play. And every English playwright knows that to offer the public a pure love-story is the surest way of winning a popular success. He knows that if he treats of unlawful love he imperils his chances and tends to drive away whole classes—one may say, the great majority of playgoers.

“Then why be so foolish as to do it?” is the obvious reply.

The dramatist has no choice. He is as helpless as Balaam, and can as little tune his prophesying to a foregone pleasing issue. A certain story presents itself to him, forces itself upon him, takes shape and coherence in his mind, becomes organic. The story comes automatically, grows naturally and spontaneously from what he has observed and experienced in the world around him, and he cannot alter its drift or reverse its significance without murdering his artistic instincts and

impulses, and making his play a dead, mechanical thing. There are many stories which treat of pure love thwarted and baffled and at last rewarded. I do not say that these stories may not be quite as worth telling as the others. But from the nature of the case, the course of a lawful love, though it may not run altogether smooth, does not offer the same tremendous opportunities to the dramatist. In affairs of love, as in those of war, happy are they who have no history! Almost all the great love-stories of the world have been stories of unlawful love, and almost all the great plays of the world are built round stories of unlawful love. David and Bathsheba, "the tale of Troy divine," Agamemnon, Œdipus, Phædra, Tristram and Iseult, Antony and Cleopatra, Hamlet, Abelard and Heloise, Paolo and Francesca, Faust and Margaret, Burns and his Scotch lassies, Nelson and Lady Hamilton—what have they to do with wax-doll morality? What has wax-doll morality to do with them?

I know the question is a difficult one. Much may be said for the French custom of keeping young girls altogether away from the theatre. I believe Dumas *fil's* did not allow his daughter to see any of his plays before she was married—a fact that reminds one of Mr. Brooke's delightful suggestion to Casaubon—"Get Dorothea to read you light things — Smollett — *Roderick Random*, *Humphrey Clinker*. They're a little broad, but *she may read anything now she's married*, you know."

But whatever liberty may for the future be

allowed to the dramatist or to his hearers, I am sure that no play which came from any English author of repute during the years included in M. Filon's survey could work in any girl's mind so much mischief as must be done by the constant trickle of little cheap cockney indecencies and suggestions which make the staple of entertainment at some of our theatres. But, as I have said, it is only the serious dramatist who in the present state of public feeling can be called to account for immoral teaching.

I have strayed far from my immediate subject. But if I have written anything that cannot be considered appropriate as a preface to M. Filon's book, I hope it may be accepted as a supplement. At the time M. Filon wrote, the English drama was a force in the land, and had the promise of a long and vigorous future. Now those who were leading it stand, for the moment, defeated and discredited before their countrymen. But the movement is not killed. It is only scotched. The English drama will always have immortal longings and aspirations, though we may not be chosen to satisfy them.

Meantime, one cannot help casting wishful eyes to France, and thinking in how different a manner we should have been received by the countrymen of M. Filon, with their alert dramatic instinct, their cultivated dramatic intelligence, their responsiveness to the best that the drama has to offer them. France would not have misunderstood us. France would not have treated us in the spirit of Bumble.

France would not have mistaken the men who were sweating to put a little life into her national drama, for a set of gloomy corrupters of youth. France would not have bound and gagged us and handed us over to the Philistines.

M. Filon has done us a kindness in bringing us for a moment before the eyes of Europe. He will have done us a far greater kindness if the English edition of his book helps our own countrymen to form a juster opinion of those who, in the face of recent discouragement and misrepresentation, who, with many faults and blunders and deficiencies, have yet struggled to make the English drama a real living art, an intellectual product worthy of a great nation.

HENRY ARTHUR JONES.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE French public has heard a great deal about modern English poets, novelists, statesmen, and philosophers. What is the reason that it hears nothing, or next to nothing, about the English drama? Your first impulse is, perhaps, to make answer—"Because there is no such thing!" A conclusive reason, and one dispensing with the need of any other, were it true. But is it true? As it seems to me, it was true some thirty years ago, but is true no longer.

And, indeed, were there no English drama at the moment at which I write, this in itself would be a phenomenon well worth studying, a problem that it would be interesting to solve. The understanding of the miscarriages of the mind, of the ineffectual but not wholly vain endeavours, the frustrated efforts of Life, contains for the critic, just as it does for the follower of any other science, the most fruitful of lessons, the most strangely suggestive of all spectacles. Were there no English drama, we should have to seek for the reasons—psychological, social, æsthetic—why the Anglo-Saxon race, which produced a Shakespeare at a time when it counted a bare three millions and covered a mere patch of ground, should now be able to produce but

clowns and dancers, when it is forty times as numerous, and has spread itself throughout the world.

But, as a matter of fact, these premises would be false. There *is* an English drama. The demand for it has been felt, and the supply is forthcoming. Or, rather, it has come. It is a strenuous youngster, determined to keep alive, bearing up pluckily, if with trouble, against all the maladies of childhood, against the dangers of evil influences—the brutal roughness of some, and the undue tenderness of others. Its growth is slow and laborious; it recalls in no way that marvellous development of the early drama, which, towards the end of the sixteenth century, passed almost in a breath from the hesitating and halting speech of youth into the rich utterance of full maturity. Here we still see doubt, uncertainty, confusion. The struggle slackens at times. Improvement is followed by lamentable relapse. But there the drama is; it is alive, and it is growing.

Ten or a dozen years ago, it was hard to say whether the drama was in process of decline or of renaissance, whether there was to be an end of it, or a new beginning. There were many even among the critics who raised their eyes in sorrow to heaven, and spoke of the drama as one speaks of the dear departed. And they talked of the past as of a golden age—"the palmy days, the halcyon days."

To-day, these pessimists are non-existent

Their place has been taken, it is true, by those intolerable carpers who, in every generation, would prevent youth from daring, regardless of the fact that youth's chief business is to dare. But these good people remain unheeded. Everyone is agreed that to-day is better than yesterday ; and almost everyone, that to - morrow will be better than to-day. Twenty or thirty years ago, the dozen theatres of London were almost always empty ; there are now three times as many, almost always full. The actors, then, were for the most part mere clowns ; they are artists now. Then, some of the best of them had little more than a bare sustenance ; now, there are some of the second rank who have their house in town and their house in the country. About 1835, a well-known author was glad to sell a drama to Frederick Yates, manager of the Adelphi, for the sum of £70, *plus* £10 for provincial rights. In 1884, a successful play (that had not yet exhausted its popularity) brought its author £10,000 within a few months, of which £3000 came from the provinces, and to which America and Australia had also contributed. This is a very sordid aspect of the case, but a very important one. £10,000 to an author must prove as effectual an incentive to the modern English author, as did a *coup d'œil de Louis* to the French dramatist in the reign of the Grand Monarque. Such profits should serve to encourage talent, if it be beyond them to generate genius.

It is not difficult to find the real reason why

the French public is kept so little and so ill informed as to the present prospects of the English drama. To read Lord Salisbury's latest speech, all one has to do is to buy a paper. One need but go to a bookseller to procure for oneself a volume of Swinburne's poems, or a novel by Stevenson, or a work by Lecky or Herbert Spencer. It is different with plays. From motives commercial rather than literary, it has been the custom not to print these until long after their production, and I could instance really popular dramas of twenty or forty years ago which have never yet been published. It is necessary, therefore, in order to study the drama, to become a regular frequenter of the theatre; or rather, it is necessary to have followed its course for a number of years in order to note, season by season, the changes it has been undergoing, the tendencies which have been developing, the growth or disappearance of foreign influences, and, finally, the course of each individual talent and of the taste of the public. This study, direct from nature—from the life—is not without difficulty, even to Englishmen; how much less easy must it be to a Frenchman? Ever since it has become the business of an actor, not merely to recite and declaim, but to reproduce faithfully life itself, how many small points must escape the ear of a foreigner?

And if it be hard to say where the drama now stands, to foresee whither it is going, it is still harder to ascertain whence it has come. You

expect from a critic, and quite properly, not merely a snapshot of a literary movement at a certain specified moment, but some record also of its process of formation. Affairs in England, even more than elsewhere, require to be thus approached by the historical method. There is no understanding what they are until you have learned what they have been. In the present instance, before examining the resuscitated drama, it is necessary to see of what it died, and how long it remained entombed. All this has to be found out for oneself. The critics of the preceding generations wasted their energies upon inessential details. Theatrical "Reminiscences" are crowded with fictitious anecdotes. This department of history is like a garden that has been neglected and grown wild ; the pathways are lost to sight.

I have believed—fondly, perhaps—that, by my special opportunities, I should escape some of these difficulties. I have resided long in England. I know something of its people and its customs. I know how much value to attach to individual testimonies, aided as I am by the thousand opinions and feelings which are in the air, so to speak, but which find their way never into print. I get the impressions of the public from the public itself. Lastly, I love the theatre, and have been an enthusiastic playgoer. During the last three or four years more especially I have seen all the new pieces ; and I may perhaps take this opportunity of expressing my appreciation of the courtesy so kindly extended to me in this

connection by the principal managers. I may mention, among those to whom I am most indebted, Mr. Tree, Mr. Hare, Mr. Wyndham, Mr. Alexander, and Mr. Comyns Carr, the talented dramatist who, in his *King Arthur*, provided Sir Henry Irving with the opportunity of rendering a last homage to the genius of Tennyson. Indeed, I have met with wide-open doors and outstretched hands wherever I have sought assistance in theatrical circles. Many authors have been good enough to place at my disposal copies of their works which had been printed only for their own use, or for that of their interpreters upon the stage.

But my greatest debt, of course, is to contemporary critics. After having first assisted me in my studies, they have done me the further kindness of encouraging me with their sympathy upon the publication of the successive instalments of my work in the pages of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Their mere attention had been a reward; their kindly approval was more than I had hoped for. I trust they will be able to accord the same indulgent reception to my book, now that it is complete, and that the spirit and feelings which have actuated me in my work will be more fully apparent.

I owe a special acknowledgment to Mr. William Archer. You will see in the course of my book the part which he has played and is still playing, the excellent seeds which he has sown broadcast, not all of which have yet borne fruit. Here, I

shall say only that, had I not had his books as a guiding thread, I should have hardly ventured to risk myself in the labyrinth of theatrical history.

There are, in the England of to-day, two schools of dramatic criticism, whose divergence of opinion is clearly marked. They are called "New Critics" and "Old Critics," though accidents of date or age are hardly at all accountable for their antagonisms; it is possible that during the next few years the old criticism may become rejuvenated and that the new criticism may age. For my part, I have sided with neither the one nor the other, because the rôle of neutral is best suited to a foreigner. I have supplemented my own personal impressions by quotations, taken impartially from both camps, of what has struck me in their criticisms as noteworthy, or happy, or true. I think that the new school is right in wishing to free the English theatre from foreign influences, and in its efforts to give the drama a moral value and an ideal. But I think the old school is not far wrong when it defends, to a certain extent, the more popular forms of dramatic art, and when it would have the drama follow the indications of success, and not isolate itself from that public of whose feelings it should be the living expression.

One word in conclusion. Among the French critics who have done me the honour of discussing my work during its serial publication, more than one has come to the conclusion that, after all, these new English dramas were not such great affairs, and that it was hardly worth while to make

so much fuss about them. They forget, these good people, that I promised them no marvels ; I did not invite them to a display of masterpieces. If there are to be masterpieces at all, they will be of to-morrow, not to-day. What I have set out to do is to ascertain at what temperature the drama comes to flower, to see how a great section of the human race sets about making to itself a new vehicle of enjoyment, of emotion, of thought, and, I may even add, of moral education. It is an essay in literary history, but also in social history. The two things go together,—are, indeed, henceforth inseparable.

I do not merely follow, step by step, the gradual transformation of the theatrical world ; I have endeavoured to make clear the attitude taken up by the drama in presence of the crisis through which society has been passing during the last score or so of years. In this strange conflict between laws and manners, upon which side will the drama definitively take up its stand ? What part will it play, and what place will it assume, in the renovation of England by the democracy ? Will it help democracy with earnest homilies ? Or check it with satire and ridicule ? Or will it turn aside from such things altogether, and aspire to those serene heights of art, to which the noises of the plain can never reach ? The secret of its downfall or glory lies perhaps in the answering of these questions. It was time to submit them, pending the hour of their solution.

CHAPTER I

A Glance back—From 1820 to 1830—Kean and Macready—The Strolling Player — The Critics — Sheridan Knowles and *Virginius*—Douglas Jerrold—His Comedies—*The Rent Day*—*The Prisoner of War*—*Black-eyed Susan*—Collapse of the Privileged Theatres—Men of Letters come to the Rescue of the Drama—Bulwer Lytton—*The Lady of Lyons*—*Richelieu*—*Money*.

FROM 1820 to 1830 the Theatre, or, to be precise, the theatres, prospered to all appearances exceedingly. We shall see just now the real significance of this prosperity; it may be compared to the great ball given by Mercadet on the eve of his bankruptcy. But no one foresaw the collapse that was impending. It was the reign of the Adonis of sixty, who had spent his life inventing pomades and breaking oaths. It would have been droll, indeed, had the man who washed his dirty linen in the House of Lords pretended to be scandalised by the licence of the stage. And his heir, also a worn-out man of pleasure, had lived for a time with an actress, Mrs. Jordan, who, before his accession to the throne, died of grief, and forsaken, at St. Cloud. The small girl named Victoria, who roamed at this time amongst the lonely avenues of the old park at Broadstairs,

and who was destined presently to bring marital love and the domestic virtues back into fashion, was still engrossed in the minding of her dolls.

The "privileged" theatres were frequented, or patronised,—to use the recognised English expression, with its savour of old-time condescension,—by Society. By the term "privileged," sub-ventioned must not be understood. To Drury Lane and Covent Garden alone belonged the right of producing the legitimate drama, the plays of Shakespeare, that is to say, and of his successors. This was their "privilege," a privilege which might soon have become but a doubtful benefit had not great actors arisen to keep alive the classical drama by their command on the suffrages of the masses. The generation of actors who had studied in the school of Garrick, and had maintained its traditions, was taking its farewell of the stage in the person of John Kemble and Mrs. Siddons—Siddons, "whose voice," one of her contemporaries tells us, "was more delicious than the most delicious music." Edmund Kean had already come forward, and after him, Macready.

I try to picture to myself these two men as they appeared upon the stage, to produce for myself from all the accounts of them that I have read the illusion of their living presence. The first thing that comes home to one is Kean's Bohemianism, Macready's respectability and good-breeding. Macready was the friend of the leading men of letters of his time, and had the

advantage of their advice and support. Kean's only intimate was the brandy-bottle that killed him. Writing to Frederick Yates, the manager of the Adelphi, to ask him for a box, he says, "I don't want to herd with the mob. I like the money of the public, but the public itself I scorn." He in his turn might be looked upon with scorn, were it not for the sufferings of his childhood and youth. If ever man had the right to hate life, it was he.

At Madame Tussaud's the two rivals may now be seen standing side by side, Kean wearing the kilt of Macbeth and Macready the chlamys of Coriolanus. Save for his small size, the former seems the better endowed by nature; his countenance is sombre and bears the stamp of the tragedian. The angular and wrinkled face of Macready, on the other hand,—his slitlike mouth, his close-compressed lips and projecting jaws,—might have made the fortune of a clown. He had only to emphasise or modify its effects, indeed, for his tragic qualities to become comic. It was thus that he rendered so admirably the officiousness and fussiness of Oakley, the sly sensuality of Joseph Surface, the English Tartufe. Alas! he evoked a smile sometimes as Othello; when the Moorish *condottiere*, this personification of a passionate, noble, and high-strung race, was lost in an insensate negro or, if Théophile Gautier were to be believed, something lower still, "an anthropoid ape."

Contemporaries seem agreed in attributing to

Kean more genius, more talent to Macready. But there are many occasions when talent serves better than genius. To see Kean, said Coleridge, was to read Shakespeare by flashes of lightning. It is a method which has its merits, but by it one misses a good deal. Kean had some wonderful moments, then relapsed into dulness and insignificance. He would stumble, like a schoolboy reciting a lesson which had no meaning for him, through the whole of the speech of the Moor of Venice before the Senate, "letting himself go" only in the last verse, in which his emotion on seeing Desdemona brought down the house. He concentrated a whole passion into these final words. It was always thus with him.

I may say of them, following Mr. Archer: of the two, Kean was the greater actor and Macready the greater artist. Everything that pertained to instinct was stronger in the one, and everything that pertained to intellect was stronger in the other. Macready bore himself best in moods of calm, rendered with most effect the more virtuous emotions,—*moral* passions one may call them. All that was greatest in Shakespeare, the very soul of his poetry, was revealed through Kean. On one point only had Macready the advantage: he had a way of gazing into space when his lined and haggard countenance seemed to tell of the seeing of things invisible. There was no one like Macready for the suggestion of the supernatural. In all the other provinces of terror Kean was the real master.

Mr. Wilton, the father of an actress of whom I shall have much to say in these pages, used to tell how in his youth, when he was still a young and unknown actor, he had had the honour of playing with Edmund Kean. They were rehearsing the scene in which Shylock, baulked of his coveted gain, rushes frantically upon the stage crying out for his prey.

"Have you ever seen me in this before?" inquired the great actor of his humble colleague.

"No, sir."

"Well, we must rehearse it then, otherwise you would be too much startled this evening."

They went through it, and yet Wilton tells us that when the evening came, Kean terrified him so by the indescribable violence of his performance that he was within an ace of losing his head and fleeing from the stage as one might flee from the cage of a wild beast.

It may be supposed from all this that Kean was in the habit of abandoning himself entirely to the inspiration of the moment. Now, inspiration upon the stage is almost a meaningless expression. In the very moments when the terrifying actor was crossing the stage like a madman, he was counting his steps. As for Macready, immediately before the great scene of Shylock he would work himself up into excitement, emitting every imaginable oath, and brandishing a heavy ladder until he panted actually for breath. Then he would rush down the stage, pallid, breathless, the sweat coursing down his face, the very picture of

a man bursting with rage. The audience would have laughed rather than have shuddered had they seen the ladder!

Macready's voice was so rich and so beautiful that it delighted even those who could not follow the meaning of the words which it gave forth. But he was too intelligent an actor to make use of it as a mere instrument of music. Until his time verses were chanted on the stage. He himself was content to declaim them. English dramatic verse consists of a succession of five iambs, which, by the alternation of short feet and long, results in a regular and cadenced rhythm. From time to time an imperfection, the deliberate introduction for instance of a trochee, or perhaps a redundant syllable added at the end of the verse, has the effect of breaking this monotony, but it recommences at once, and the mind relapses under its sway, just as a child is sent to sleep again by a lullaby. My foreign ear was long in taking to it, but at last I began to derive from its melody the same delight that the music of Greek and Latin verse had given me long before. This verse, so interesting and curious in its structure, seems to bear a certain secret affinity with the genius of the English race; the rhythm would seem to have been suggested by the clattering of a horse's hoofs, or by the murmuring of waves.

It is, then, no easy matter to deal with it. Macready approached it reverentially, as was but fitting in a scholar and a devotee of Shakespeare. He wished to leave to it all its melody, its poetic

beauty, but he wished at the same time to emphasise the most important words and to bring out the full force of their meaning. He wished to blend the pure classicism of John Kemble with the passion of Kean, and to add that tendency to realism which marked his own temperament, and which sometimes carried him too far; when as Macbeth he came back from Duncan's room, he looked, according to Lewes, like an Old Bailey ruffian.

It is enough for me to have shown that Macready, like many others in different parts of Europe in 1825, was prepared for a drama that should be in closer touch with life. In France, Romanticism came to turn aside and check the movement. In England, there came absolutely nothing.

But the bankruptcy of the new school was still far off, and the literary atmosphere was charged with warlike sounds at the time when Macready made his appearance in France, with an English company, in the course of the year 1827. He was received as a missionary. He had come to preach Shakespeare to a tribe of poor "ignoramuses," whom their fathers had taught to worship the idols of Lemierre and Luce de Lancival, but who were now anxious to be converted. The young "leading lady" was a Miss Smithson, whose Irish accent clashed somewhat with the verse of Shakespeare. The Parisians thought she had talent, and lost their hearts to "la belle Smidson."¹

¹ Berlioz did so literally, and married her.

In London she was a joke. It is certain, however, that these performances revealed to him who was to be the only true dramatist of the romantic school—to Alexandre Dumas—the secret of a new art; that they made an epoch, therefore, in our literary history, and that they affixed the seal to the reputation of the English tragedian.

Over and above the privileged theatres, there were a number of others, such as the Haymarket and the Adelphi, at which farces and melodramas were chiefly given. In the provinces there prevailed a curious system, without any analogue, so far as I know, in France, that of going on circuit,—a term borrowed, like the system itself, from the language and customs of the law. Just as the English judges make the round at certain dates of all the important towns within a certain district, holding assizes at each, and accompanied by an army of barristers, solicitors, and legal officials of all kinds, so the travelling companies of actors would cater for a whole county, or group of counties, giving a series of performances in the theatre of every town at certain fixed dates, in addition to fête-days and market-days. Communication was slow and costly in those days, and trips to London infinitely rarer than they are now. The country folk had to look to their travelling company to keep them in touch with the successes of the moment.

On arriving in a new town, the manager's wife would go about soliciting respectfully the patronage of the ladies of the place. The manager

busied himself over everything, played minor rôles, presided over the box-office, undertook the scene painting, and would even take off his coat and turn up his sleeves and lend a hand to the machinist. His life, and the life of all his company, was half *bourgeois*, half Bohemian; always *en route*, but always on the same beat, always coming upon familiar and friendly faces,—a beat on which his father and grandfather before him had followed the same career. He had friends living in every city, dead friends in every churchyard. Children were born to him on his travels, and when four or five years old made their appearance upon the stage. These comings and goings, the journeyings over green fields, the stoppages and ample breakfastings at little hill-side inns, while the horses browsed at large along the hedges,—the freshness and peaceful rusticity of all these things, alternating with the tinsel of the theatre and the applause of the audiences, with the artificiality and feverishness of theatrical life,—must have been a constant entertainment to the little actors and actresses of eight or nine. For the adults, however, the life was a hard one, and only too often their *roman comique* was a *roman tragique* in reality.

The public of these small towns wanted, on their part, to know something of what went on behind the scenes. Sides were taken on the subject of the actor's life, and hot discussions were called forth. Idle pens took to writing pamphlets for or against individual actors, and these had to

defend themselves as best they might against their malignant inquisitors, using their booths as pulpits for the purpose. Here, for instance, is an incident that occurred one evening in a Northern town after the curtain had been raised for *Antony and Cleopatra*. The *jeune premier* comes forward to the footlights, and takes the hand of one of the leading actresses with the stiff, staid courtliness of former days, and the following dialogue is exchanged between them :—

“ Have I ever been guilty of any injustice of any kind to you since you have been in the theatre? ”

“ No, sir ” (she replies).

“ Have I ever behaved to you in an ungentlemanlike manner? ”

“ No, sir.”

“ Have I ever kicked you? ”

“ Oh, no! sir! ”

The audience applauds. Antony and Cleopatra assume their correct attitudes and (this prologue to Shakespeare successfully performed) proceed with their rôles.¹

From time to time a great artist came forth, after three or four generations of mediocrities, from one of these theatrical nurseries. The others remained tied to their stake, revolving ceaselessly within the orbit of their chain. For them there was no question of glory or fortune. They lived simply and happily, if only they came to the end of the year without having gone to prison, and if only at the end of

¹ William Archer, *Life of Macready*.

their life they saw their children growing up and getting educated. Their courage they derived in part from the bottle, in part from religion. A correspondence which has come to light through an unforeseen chance (a grandson who had become famous) revivifies for us the actor-manager on circuit. He is a good fellow, but a trifle sententious. He quotes from the works of his authors, tragic and comic (he has them at his finger-ends) axioms upon all the incidents and experiences of life. He quotes them just as Nehemiah Wallington or Colonel Hutchinson used to quote the Bible. He is as easily excited and as easily calmed as a child. A storm troubles him as a bad omen. A rainbow smiles on him as a promise. Providence may be trusted, he believes, to look after the takings of poor players. He is the Vicar of Wakefield become *père noble*.

Neither in this monotonous and easy-going phase of life, nor in the theatrical world of London, had anyone any idea of modifying the forms or the tendencies of the stage. Those whose duty it should have been to give the necessary impulse did not seem even to suspect that there was any such work for them to perform. The critics of the time, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Charles Lamb, have achieved a permanent place in literature. And yet when one reads them one is disappointed. Except for a few pages of Lamb, one may look to them in vain for the expression of anything like a general idea. They

are taken up almost altogether in discussing and comparing the different actors. It does not occur to them to attempt an appreciation or a classification of the plays, for these plays had already been definitively classified and pronounced upon. There was no drama, they seemed to think, except that of Shakespeare and his satellites; and as for comedy, it had said its last word when Goldsmith and Sheridan died. And they were quite content that this should be so. They saw no reason why they, their successors, and the general public, should not continue until the end of time to carp over an entry of Macbeth or an exit of Othello!—or why they should not sit out revivals without end of *The School for Scandal* or *She Stoops to Conquer*. There are eras which will have novelties at all cost, and eras which cling to antiquity.

Macready, with the instinct of a “realistic” and “modern” actor, kept on the lookout for authors. A former Irish schoolmaster, who also had been an actor, and whose name was Sheridan Knowles, brought him a tragedy entitled *Virginus* which he had written in three months. He made a good deal of this point, never having read, probably, the scene of the sonnet of Oronte. The piece was put into rehearsal and played at Covent Garden in the spring of 1820. Reynolds introduced the unknown author to the public in a carefully-written prologue. In it he ridiculed the drama of the period, which he described as “stories”—

“ . . . piled with dark and cumbrous fate,
And words that stagger under their own weight.”

He promised to return to Truth and Nature, the invariable programme of all attempts at reforming the drama. And as a matter of fact, *Virginus* might be accepted in a certain sense as a return to Truth and Nature. It belonged to what we were going to call in France, twenty-five years later, the School of Common Sense. Or if one prefers to look back instead of forward, one might say that in it the rules of Diderot and Sedaine's *Drame Bourgeois* seem to have been transferred to Roman tragedy. The piece, like the plays of Shakespeare, was partly in verse and partly in prose, but the verse was little more, really, than metrical prose. The plot developed clearly and logically with a scrupulous observance of the probable and natural. The heroine (one smiles at having to describe her by so grand a name) is for all the world a little *pensionnaire* who might have got her ideas on rectitude from Miss Edgeworth. She occupies herself with her needle in working together her initials and those of the young man of her choice, who is no other than the tribune Icilius. It is this piece of embroidery which reveals her secret. “My father is incensed with you,” she says to Icilius, and, her lover becoming impassioned, she covers her face with her hands, saying (as is correct at such a juncture), “Leave me, leave me!” He does not obey, and the author, not knowing how else to prolong the

scene, has recourse to high-sounding language. . . . "Thou dost but beggar me, Icilius," exclaims Virginia, "when thou makest thyself a bankrupt." And Icilius replies, . . . "My sweet Virginia, we do but lose and lose, and win and win, playing for nothing but to lose and win. Then let us drop the game—and thus I stop it," and he stops it by seizing her in his arms.

In the scene in which the client of Appius attempts to possess himself of her, Virginia remains absolutely mute. She is mute also in the great scene of the judgment, and she seems, moreover, to have understood nothing of what has been happening, for she asks her father if he is going to take her home. From the angels and furies of Shakespeare and Corneille we have come down to a virtuous idiot, and are told that this is a return to Nature.

Virginius is an excellent father, a liberal-minded member of the middle class, interesting himself in politics. He knows his rights and does not stand in awe of the ministers. He reminds one of the city man who returns home to his comfortable residence in Chiswick or Hampstead after his day's work in his Leadenhall Street office. He is a widower, but his house is looked after by a very respectable elderly person, in whose excellent sentiments and weak intelligence we recognise a housekeeper of the superior type. The whole household is tranquil, well behaved, Christian,—I might even say, Puritan.

Doubtless the Romans of the republic were

men like ourselves, but a true picture of their humanity should reveal characteristics different from ours. The author should either have sought out these characteristics, or else have restricted himself to that sphere of great passions and heroic madneses in which all the centuries meet on common ground. One is obliged, however unwillingly, to admit the impossibility of retrospective realism.

When Virinius returns from the camp to defend his child, he gazes on her long, and tells her he had never seen her look so like her mother—

“. . . It was her soul, . . . her soul that played
just then

About the features of her child, and lit them
Into the likeness of her own. When first
She placed thee in my arms—I recollect it
As a thing of yesterday!—she wished, she said,
That it had been a man. I answered her,
It was the mother of a race of men;
And paid her for thee with a kiss.” . . .

There is something at once virile and moving in this passage, but how many such cases are to be found in this tragedy? The paternal emotion of Virinius prepares us but ill for the heroic crime which he is to commit. There is the same contrast between the antiquity of the events and the modernness of the characters.

But the ruin of the piece was the fifth act.

Virginia dead, it remains only to punish Appius according to the good old laws of tragic justice. For that, a single moment and a single gesture had been enough. Sheridan Knowles was in the position of being obliged to write his fifth act and having nothing to put into it. He had recourse to a mad scene. Merimée has written that "*il faut laisser aux débutants les foux et les chiens.*" This doctrine has Homer and Shakespeare against it. On the other hand, the example of Sheridan Knowles proves that the recourse to madness will not always get the beginner out of his difficulty.

Virginius has succeeded in making his way into Appius's prison—

"How if I thrust my hand into your breast,
And tore your heart out, and confronted it
With your tongue. I'd like it. Shall we try it?"

When the old centurion plunged his hands into the robes of the *decemvir*, as though he expected to find Virginia in his pocket, and when Appius, horrified at finding himself "caged with a mad-man," appealed for help with all the strength of his lungs whilst calling out to his assailant, "Keep down your hands! Help! Help!"—I cannot imagine how the spectators of 1820 can have refrained from laughter. The two men quitted the scene fighting, and turned up again in another room,—for the prison was a veritable suite of rooms. Having killed Appius, the old man grew

calm, and Icilius had but to call him by his name to bring back to him his reason. He slipped a small urn into his hands. “What is this?” asks Virginius. “That is Virginia.” And the curtain fell.

Contemporary critics admitted that the last act was somewhat weak. It was curtailed, but delete it as one would, it was still too long. Had it been reduced to ten lines, these ten lines had been ten lines too much.

In spite of everything, however, *Virginius*, by Macready’s help, remained a masterpiece for twenty-five years! Knowles made haste to produce some more. He tells in one of his naïve prefaces, how he went to stop with his friend, Mr. Robert Dick, near an Irish lough known for its scenery and its fish, how he would spend the morning at his composition and the afternoon angling, and how his host would snatch his fishing line from his hands whenever he caught him using it before midday. . . . If only Mr. Dick had let him fish in peace! The trout he might have hooked had been at least as valuable as his verse and prose.

If there was any sort of foreshadowing of a national drama in the years 1830 to 1840, it must be sought for in the works of Douglas Jerrold. France knows little of Jerrold, who knew France so well. His was a valiant little soul; his life was one long battle—a battle against obscurity, against ill luck, against the enemies of his country, against the oppressors of the poor, last but not

least, against all those whom he disliked. He belonged to that theatrical world at which I have glanced. He was the son of a provincial manager who had met with failure. In his early youth, while yet a child, one may say, he served as midshipman in the wars against Napoleon. He became a journalist later, and threw himself into the midst of politics. Whatever may be said of his caustic and aggressive temperament, he belonged, every inch of him, to that noble generation which aspired so fervently after better things, which strove so strenuously for what was right, which believed it could help humanity forward on the way to a progress without bounds. For forty years he vibrated with generous passions, and grew calm only in the presence of death, which he met like a stoic but with a simplicity not all the stoics knew. I have been brought into intimate relations with his son, who has repeated to me his last words—"This is as it should be." To fight for justice and to accept the inevitable without fear,—this was the life of a man.

The Rent Day was played on January 25, 1832, that is to say, at the commencement of the memorable year which was to see the passing of the Reform Bill. It is the day upon which the rents have become due. The tenants have brought their money. There is drinking and laughing and singing, the while the heaps of crowns are exchanged for receipts,—for nothing was accomplished in England in those days with-

out drinking, and on rent day it had been almost a disgrace not to be at least "well on." The middleman is presiding over the function. This morning he has received a letter from the young squire, thus expressed—"Master Crumbs, use all despatch, and send me, on receipt of this, five hundred pounds. Cards have tricked me and the devil coggled the dice. Get the money at all costs, and quickly.—ROBERT GRANTLEY." The middleman therefore must have no pity. There is one farmer who cannot pay; his brother the schoolmaster comes to plead for him. He himself is too poor to lend—

Toby (the schoolmaster): "My goods and chattels are a volume of *Robinson Crusoe*, ditto *Pilgrim's Progress*, with Plutarch's *Morals*, much like the morals of many other people—a good deal dog's eared." . . .

Crumbs: "Has your brother no one to speak for him?"

Toby: "Now, I think on't, yes. There are two."

Crumbs: "Where shall I find them?"

Toby: "In the churchyard. Go to the graves of the old men, and there are the words the dead will say to you:—'We lived sixty years in Holly Farm; in all that time we never begged an hour of the squire; we paid rent, tax, and tithe; we earned our bread with our own hands, and owed no man a penny when laid down here. Well, then, will you be hard on young Heywood; will ye press upon our child, our poor Martin, when

murrain has come upon his cattle and blight fallen upon his corn?' This is what they will say."

The middleman is not one to be moved by the supplications of the schoolmaster. He replies monotonously, inexorably — "My accounts; I must settle my accounts!" Grouped round him, farther back, are the instruments of his lowly tyrant, the beadle (for whom a young writer now hidden from the public eye in the gallery of the House of Commons, Charles Dickens, has in store so terrible a cudgelling) and the appraiser. In those days it was the beadle's function to execute evictions for the benefit of young squires who had lost at cards. The first act of *The Rent Day* concludes with a spectacle of this kind. We witness the seizing of the peasant's bed and of all his furniture, down to a bird-cage and the children's toys. The scene follows its course; entreaties, curses, threats, then silence and desolation. It was thus that the social question was submitted. Had we been there, and in our twentieth year,—you and I who have to contest against the grandsons of the victims, become in their turn slave-drivers,—we should have joined with the rest of the pit in cheering Jerrold.

The first act gives promise of a vigorous comedy of manners, but we sink gradually into a dense melodrama crowded with absurd incidents and extravagant surprises. Was this Jerrold's fault, or that of a public which insisted upon monster jokes and monster crimes? I am in-

clined to adopt the latter explanation, for supply is regulated by demand; a mercantile axiom which resolves itself in a great natural and highly scientific law.

Jerrold could achieve a light and realistic touch at need, and he has given proof of it in *A Prisoner of War*. The scene is laid in France shortly after the rupture of the Treaty of Amiens. Quite impartially, and with consummate wit, Jerrold holds up to ridicule the *chauvinisme* of the two nations. He does not confound bombast with valour. “Soldiers,” says one character, “should die and civilians lie for their country.” We are shown—and this has some historical value—the English prisoners living comfortably in a French town, frequenting the Café Imperial, regaling themselves on the bulletins of the “Grande Armée,” with no other obligation than that of answering the roll-call morning and evening. They have money, for the lodging-house keepers compete for their favour; and they pay little French boys to sing “Rule Britannia.” As it seems to me, if Garneray’s Memoirs are to be believed, our compatriots were hardly so well off on the English hulks.

But what strikes me most in *A Prisoner of War* is one really ingenious and moving scene. It is the evening. An old officer, a prisoner, has remained late over a game of cards with a comrade. Meantime his daughter Clary has a man in her bedroom. Don’t be alarmed—the man is her husband. A secret marriage is always

introduced in English plays wherever a seduction is to be found in ours. Suddenly Clary is called out to, loudly, by her father. She imagines herself found out, and arrives quite pallid. What had she been doing? her father asks. How was it she had a light still in her window? So she had been reading, eh? Still reading—always reading. And what had she been reading? Novels! As though there weren't enough real tears in the world—real, scalding, bitter tears from breaking hearts—but we must have a parcel of lying books to make people cry double! And what was this silly novel of hers? Clary doesn't know what to answer, and begins telling her own story—the youth of no family and fortune, the moment of recklessness, the giving of her heart to him and then her hand. “Well, and how did it end?” asks the old officer. Clary had “not come to the end”! Ah, then (he resumes), she had turned down the page when he had interrupted her? But he could tell her how it ended. The young couple went upon their knees, and the father swore a little, then took out his pocket handkerchief, wiped his eyes, and forgave them.

At this Clary's face lights up with hope. So that would be the ending, according to him! He could assure her of it? Yes, he replies, he could assure her of it. She is on the point of falling upon her knees. Behind the half-open door, behind which there glimmers the light of a candle, her lover waits, ready to rush forward upon a word from her. “Of course, in real life

it would be quite another thing," goes on her father. "If it were I, what would you do?" "I'd kill him like a dog. And as for you— But there, it's too horrible to think of! Let's talk of something else." And he tells her he has found a husband for her. Naturally she protests. The old man goes off again into a fury. "These cursed novels are turning your head. I shall go and burn them this instant." And he steps towards the door, behind which Clary's lover stands trembling.

All this is old-fashioned enough; it dates from the time when the drama was made out of the materials of a vaudeville. And yet I think that even nowadays this scene would tell.

But once again Jerrold had to follow the public taste which led him so terribly astray. His greatest success was his worst production, *Black-eyed Susan*, the popularity of which does not appear to have been even yet exhausted. The hero is a sailor, who translates the simplest ideas into nautical phraseology; the heroine a woman of humble birth, who expresses the loftiest sentiments in the finest language. The prolonged success of such a piece shows the delight which the lower sections of the public derive from the extravagant and the absurd,—the gross idealism, as one may call it, of the masses.

It is more difficult to understand how Jerrold, who had some regard for realism, and who had himself served on the sea, could have brought himself to write a drama which had in it not a

semblance of truth, not a touch of nature. In spite of all, however, even in *Black-eyed Susan*, one may find that unrestrained violence, that *diable au corps*, which our fathers accepted willingly as passion.

It was not the public taste alone that was at fault; from the year 1830 the commercial decadence of the English theatre became more and more marked. As often happens, contemporaries failed to appreciate the real meaning of this, and attributed it to accidental causes; amongst others, to the rivalry between Drury Lane and Covent Garden, a rivalry which was carried to absurd extremes under some of the managers, who bid against each other, both for plays and players, to an extent that ruined them. Then came the notion of ending this dangerous competition by uniting the two houses under the same management, but the enterprise proved too big for one man and for a single company. The separate existence had to come into force again. A certain Captain Polhill, who aspired to the rôle of a Mæcenæ, lost fifty thousand pounds in two years over the management of Drury Lane. Then Macready in his turn had a try, and managed the two theatres successively from 1838 to 1843.

The privileged theatres were no longer living on their privilege; they were dying of it. Theatres were springing up all round them, which succeeded sometimes in drawing the public by strange means. Edmund Yates, whose father was then manager

of the Adelphi, has given us in his memoirs some idea of the attractions then in vogue : a Chinese giant, Indian dancers, a legless acrobat who got himself up with spreading wings as a monstrous fly, and who sprang about, tied on to a thread, from floor to ceiling. The privileged theatres had no other course than to emulate the unprivileged ones. They produced Shakespeare in the form of curtain-raisers, or to wind up the evening before half-empty benches. They sliced him, carved him limb from limb, and served him up in bits, or floating in a dish of music, with a garnishment of loud and vulgar *mise en scène*, of which the contemporaries of Elizabeth would have been ashamed. And, in spite of all, in spite even of Macready's talent (Kean had died in 1833), they could not get the public to accept him. The new public which filled the theatres was gluttonous rather than *gourmet*, and wanted not quality but quantity—at least six acts every evening, and sometimes even seven or eight. Masterful, clamorous, ill-bred, uncouth in its expression both of enjoyment and of dissatisfaction, its attitude astounded Price Puckler-Muskau, a very careful observer who visited England about the time. Macready acknowledges that there were some corners in Drury Lane where a respectable woman might not venture. The barbarians had begun to arrive ; it was the first wave of democracy before which the *habitué*, the playgoer of the old school, was forced to flee.

In 1832 a Commission was instituted by

Parliament for the purpose of going into the question of liberty for the theatre. The members could not agree upon the subject, and the question was not settled until after eleven years of discussion. Before this ultimate surrender of Privilege and Tradition to the new spirit, one last effort had been made by men of letters to save the theatre. This was when the great tragedian undertook the management of Covent Garden. There was only one feeling in the world of literature: "We must back up Macready!" Everyone helped. John Forster applied himself to the stage management. Leigh Hunt left aside his criticisms to undertake a tragedy (based on a legend in which Shelley had already found inspiration), and those who could not do so much penned prologues and epilogues and brought them to Covent Garden, just as in former days, at moments of national peril, the patriotic rich brought their valuables to the Mint.¹

From this abortive renaissance there remain one reputation and three plays. The three plays are *The Lady of Lyons*, *Richelieu*, and *Money*; the reputation is that of Bulwer, the first Lord Lytton. Bulwer passed himself off as a *grand seigneur* and a genius; he was really but a clever man and a dandy, who exploited literature for his social advancement. He affected a lofty

¹ "Write me a drama," said Macready to young Browning, "and save me having to go off to America." The drama was written, but attained only a fourth performance, and did not save the actor from his impending expedition.

originality, but his talents were mostly imitative. His chief gift, almost entirely wanting in his books, but very notable in his life, was what we call *finesse*. He took from the Byronian Satanism as much as England would put up with in 1840. He copied Victor Hugo secretly and discreetly. A sort of Gothic democrat, he managed at the same time to charm romantic youths and flatter the proletariat by pretending to hurl down that society in whose front rank he aspired to take his place. His novels were terribly long-winded, but there are generations which find such a quality to their taste. When at last it was discovered that his sublimity was a spurious sublimity, that his history was false history, his "middle-ages" bric-a-brac, his poetry mere rhetoric, his democracy a farce, his human heart a heart that had never beat in a man's breast, his books mere windy bladders,—why, it was too late! The game had been played successfully and was over—the squireen of Knebworth, the self-styled descendant of the Vikings, had founded a family and hooked a peerage.

He had an eye for all the popular causes which were to be served—and were likely to be of service. When there was talk of reforming the drama, he at once came to the front and took the lead. He was the heart and soul of the Commission of 1832. He was one of those who came to the support of Macready in 1838. It was to this end he wrote *The Lady of Lyons* (without putting his name to it at first).

This is a literary melodrama; a detestable combination, for melodrama, considered either as a variation from drama proper or as a separate type, is not to be raised to the dignity of literature by the veneering of it with a thin layer of poetry. This operation does but produce wild and violent incongruities. In the first act of *The Lady of Lyons*, Madame Deschappelles is a Palais Royal *Maman*. Only a Palais Royal *Maman*, and only one of the most pronounced of them at that, could imagine she would become a dowager princess by marrying her daughter to a prince. Pauline belongs to the same repertory. What are one's feelings, then, on hearing tragic verses from her lips in the third act and seeing her compete with Imogene and Griselda in the sublimity (and absurdity) of her self-sacrifice! In the fourth act she has resumed something of her natural temperament—the temperament of a prim and tedious governess.

But I suppose I must put up with Pauline Deschappelles willy-nilly! It is one of the accepted doctrines of the old dramatic psychology that a character can pass from good to evil at critical moments, and pass out again even when all egress is barred. It is an absurd notion, but if Bulwer conforms to it, at least he is in the same boat with many others. Where he is himself at fault—that which indicates the obliquity of his moral outlook—is his having presented to us in Claude Melnotte a hero who is a double-dyed cheat. A mere peasant by birth, he passes him-

self off as a prince and marries under his false name the daughter of a rich bourgeois ; a soldier by profession, he becomes a general within two years, and in these two years amasses a fortune. How? By what methods of brigandage we are not told, but we are left to accept it as a matter of course. As regards the first point, love may perhaps be held to excuse the crime ; as regards the second, no one seems ever to have raised any objection, and it has been left for me to state my difficulty. In a sufficiently disingenuous preface, Bulwer accounts for the incoherences and extravagances of his hero by the state of extraordinary excitement into which men's minds had been thrown by the French Revolution. This explanation has sufficed for the author's fellow-countrymen, and the Revolution has a broad back. But I am afraid that Bulwer was not clear in his mind as to the kind of madness to which Frenchmen were impelled by it,—and still more, that he has confounded our generals with our contractors. Our Desaix and our Ouvrards are not made of the same clay nor moulded in the same form ; a fact as to which, unfortunately, he remained unenlightened.

After having made his anonymity serve the purpose of an advertisement, the author consented to reveal his identity whilst announcing at the same time that *The Lady of Lyons* would be a sole experiment. The very next year he appeared before the public with the tragedy of *Richelieu*, in which Macready played the principal

rôle. This piece may be compared with the Cromwell of Victor Hugo. It was marked by the same mixture of tragedy and melodrama ; the same display of historical documents and the same ignorance of what is essential in history ; the same use of the lowest and the most eccentric expedients to raise a laugh or cause a shudder ; the same superficial and crude psychology which in each character, male or female, great or small, reveals the personality of the author. Even when this author is a Victor Hugo it is bad enough ! But when it is a Bulwer— !

When he blended into one plot the *journée des Dupes* and the conspiracy of the Duc de Bouillon, together with some features borrowed from the adventure of Cinq-Mars and De Thou, the author mingled together two periods which could not and should not be thus confounded, the beginning and the end of Richelieu's career.¹ He managed, too, to falsify English history as well, incidentally, by making Richelieu refer in Council to Cromwell, at that time a still obscure member of the House of Commons. Richelieu speaks of the antagonism between Charles and Oliver at a period when the latter is not even a captain of cavalry. But what is an anachronism of this kind compared to that which involves the principal character in one continued topsy-turveydom ? It is the drawback both of the historical play and the historical

¹ As a matter of fact, Bulwer had not even the merit of inventing this arrangement for himself. His play was founded on the novel by X.-B. Saintine.

novel, that they put the great figures of history before us in a form and in an attitude that their contemporaries could have never witnessed ; confessing, describing, revealing themselves just to illustrate their character by their conversation, always dilating on their deeds instead of doing them. But of all the braggarts in theatrical history, Bulwer's Richelieu is the most vain-glorious and the most intolerable. It is all very well for the author to say in his preface that the cardinal was the father of French civilisation and the architect of the monarchy ; he may say what he likes : but we cannot stand Richelieu when he talks of himself in the same strain and in the third person, just as Michelet and Carlyle might in a fit of raving ; nor when he counterfeits death in order to play the ghost, nor when he weeps theatrically, and addresses declamatory love messages to “ La France.”—“ France, I love thee, —Richelieu and France are one ! ” Nor can we believe in him when he sees modern France come to life again from out the cinders of feudalism. After such nonsensical dicta, indeed, one would be hardly surprised to hear him exclaim, “ I am the precursor of 1789 ; what I cannot consummate, Bonaparte shall achieve in the Sessions of the Conseil d'Etat ! ”

The secondary characters are one - idea'd. Beringhen can say nothing but “ Let's discuss the pâté ! ” and the Duc d'Orleans is limited to “ Marion dotes on me.” To the tragi-comedy there is tacked on a melodrama made after the

approved methods of the Boulevard—a succession of events and surprises which cancel out. You feel you are expected to shout, Bravo Richelieu! bravo Baradas! Just as at the Porte Saint Martin or at the Ambigu you cry out, Bravo d'Artagnan! bravo Mordaunt! It is the system of Dumas without his art.

Lord Lytton lacked both imagination and ingenuity. His effects are poor, and he overdoes them. The first resuscitation of Richelieu comes near to impressing one, the second is simply silly. The kernel of the play consists of a document which passes through every pocket but never reaches its address. At the moment, the owner of this treasure is a prisoner at the Bastille. Instead of searching him, the Government sends a courtier to seize him by the throat and rob him of it. The scene is witnessed through a key-hole and described to us by a little page of Richelieu's—the rôle being played by a woman. The page throws himself on the courtier the moment he comes out in order to snatch from him the fateful paper, and the conclusion of the drama results from these two encounters. One might sum up *Richelieu* as a mixture of bad Hugo with worse Dumas!

Money is by way of depicting English Society as it was in 1840. It recognised itself, or rather its enemies recognised it, in this caricature! Are we to believe that the gambling scene in the third act takes place in an aristocratic club? It is more in keeping with the back parlour of a

public-house. A very well-known critic, who represents the ideas of a whole class and of a whole school, in alluding to the success which the piece met with in the first instance, and which it meets with still on every revival, declares that the spectators wished to show their appreciation of the “humour of a scholar.” I must confess that I can recognise neither the scholar nor the humour. On the contrary, what I see in it is a spurious sensibility and that moral obliquity to which I have referred. Alfred Evelyn, who has been enriched by the will of an eccentric cousin, and who now sees the world at his feet after having experienced its disdain, decides to share his fortune with an unknown girl who has sent £10 to his old nurse at a time when he himself was too poor to come to her aid. It is in this silly intention that he is throwing away his happiness, and that the plot finds its motive. He is engaged to a young girl whom he doesn’t love, and in order to get rid of her, this mirror of refinement, this Alcestes with all his fine scorn of average humanity, pretends to ruin himself at play in the presence of his destined father-in-law. The girl whom he loves has refused (in Act 1.) to marry him, not because he is poor, but because, poor herself, she was afraid of being a drag on him in his career. But someone had entered during her explanation and she had not been able to finish her sentence. She finishes it in the last act, and it transpires also that it was she who had really sent the £10, the two lovers

fall into each other's arms. That is really all there is in *Money* over and above the social satire, which to my thinking is terribly far-fetched, and that wonderful "humour" which I have been unable personally to discover.

Bulwer was not the man to save the erring Drama. Stronger men than he might have tried in vain to do so. It was not to the men of letters, the scholars, that it was to owe its salvation. The democracy had to come to the use of reason and to educate itself. Instead of the artificial drama which was offered to them, they held out for a drama sprung from its own loins, born of its own passions, made after its own image, palpitating with its own life; literary it might become later, if it could. And to this end, in the words of Olivier Saint-Jean, "It was necessary that things should go worse still before they could go better."

CHAPTER II

Macready's Withdrawal from the Stage—The Enemies of the Drama in 1850: Puritanism; the Opera; the Pantomime; the "Hippodrama"—French Plays and French Players in England—Actors of the Period—The Censorship—The Critics—The Historical Plays of Tom Taylor and the Irish Plays of Dion Boucicault.

MACREADY played once more in Paris in 1846, but the times were changed, and he achieved only a *succès d'estime*. He then visited America, where his presence evoked professional jealousies and bad blood, resulting in serious riots in which lives were lost. On February 26, 1851, the great actor gave his farewell performance. A brilliant page of Lewes has kept alive until our own day the emotion of this memorable occasion, which marks an era in the history of English art. Macready was in deep mourning; he had just lost a daughter of twenty years of age. He did not declaim his speech, but gave it forth with dignified sadness. In it he laid claim only to two merits—that of having brought back the text of Shakespeare in its purity, and that of having made of the theatre a place in which decent folks need not hesitate to be seen. He foresaw that if his glory as an artist should fade

with the gradual disappearance of those who had witnessed it, his work as a literary restorer and a moral reformer would survive. And he was right.

The farewell performance was followed by a banquet, at which the inevitable Bulwer took the chair. John Forster read aloud at it some verses by Tennyson. The Laureate had graven on the tomb of the tragedian's career the three words, "Moral, Grave, Sublime."

Then all was over. The voice that had thrilled so many souls was to be heard only at charitable entertainments and provincial gatherings. And when he died in 1873 England had forgotten him.

There is a story of his last days which I cannot refrain from repeating, though it has no bearing really upon the subject of this book. When the old man, confined by paralysis to his armchair, was cut off from the world by the loss of several of his senses, he would be seen acting to himself (barely so much as moving his lips the while) the masterpieces he had loved. There was nothing to reveal the progress of the play save the light that would illumine his ever-mobile countenance, to which new lines had been given by conscious use and solitary thought.

How fine they must have been, these impersonations — Lear, Hamlet, Macbeth — in the mysterious half-shades of his life's evening and in the silent theatre of his mind, where there was nothing to shackle the artist in his struggle after

perfection, where every aspiration was an achievement!

If I have spoken at some length of Macready, it is because I cannot bring myself to regard him as the representative of a dead art, the last High Priest of a shattered idol. On the stage and off the stage, Macready was a pioneer. He was the first to see the coming of Realism, and he was the first actor of good breeding. But a long time was to ensue ere his example would be followed and understood. The stage, when he left it, was in a state of confusion and of squalor difficult to describe.

Strive as Macready would to cleanse the theatre, the prejudice which kept certain classes apart from it seemed to grow and spread. The accession of the young Queen heralded one of those moods of puritanism which are chronic with English society. Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations multiplied, and, in providing innocent and free amusements for the artizan, they competed with the theatre at the same time as with the public-house. With the higher classes it was music that was injuring the drama by its rivalry. For a long time—as Lady Gay Spanker put it in a comedy of the time—the English had known no music but the barking of the hounds; now it was that Society began to scramble for boxes at extravagant prices to hear Grisi sing. A quarrel between the singer and her manager having led to a severance, the now “star”-less company, by a marvellous stroke of

luck, was enabled to shine afresh with Jenny Lind. This rivalry continued, and together with the burning of Her Majesty's Theatre it led to the invasion of the two great London theatres by foreign musicians. The opera held sway from the end of March to the end of July. The Pantomime, at first humble and modest, but growing stronger every year, began now at Christmas and lasted throughout a considerable portion of the winter. A short autumn season was all that remained for the drama, or rather melodrama, and for what was worse than the others, the "Hippodrama." Thus was entitled a new kind of production in which horses had the principal rôles. More than one popular author was glad to invent plots for these singular protagonists. Shakespeare, who had had to go turns hitherto with the lions of the tamer Van Ambrugh,—he and they roaring on alternate evenings,—had to give in completely before the Hippodrama. He took refuge in a suburban theatre, Sadler's Wells, with the actor Phelps, and there he was able eventually to boast, like that survivor of the Reign of Terror—*J'ai vécu*. To arouse any interest in him amongst the English public, it was necessary that he should be stumbled through by foreigners or lisped by babes.

According to an old brochure of the time which groans over the depth of the humiliation of the theatre, people stood still to look a second time at the madman who could attempt to run Covent Garden or Drury Lane. To the reckless amateur

succeeded the shameless adventurer, the shy contractor with empty pockets that called for filling. About 1850 one of these great theatres was managed by an ex-policeman who had started a restaurant ; later it passed into the hands of a theatre attendant. One manager was arrested for theft in the wings of his own theatre. It is easy to imagine how dramatic art would develop in the hands of such men. They dispensed with scenery and stage properties, and made shift with an empty stage ; they squandered their substance and lavished their genius upon the art of advertising ; their puffs and prospectuses were the only masterpieces of the times. There were some who sought to excite English chauvinism, pre-jingoism as one may call it, by such performances as that of the national acrobat who turned head over heels ninety-one times while his American rival was achieving but eighty-one, thus conquering the New World by ten somersaults.

These things succeeded in attracting the public, but *what* public? Theatre-goers were but a small section really of the public—a group apart on whom lay a certain suspicion of immorality connected with an evil reputation of being un-English. There was some ground for this last reproach. Foreigners were gaining ground. It would seem that there was no getting along without us French between 1850 and 1865. We were translated and adapted in every form. Our melodramas were transplanted bodily ; our comedies were coarsened and exaggerated into farces ;

sometimes even, that nothing might be lost, our operas were ground down into plays. Second-rate pieces were honoured with two or three successive adaptations; and dramas which had lived a brief hour at the Boulevard du Crime, in England became classics. There is a tradition that the director of The Princess's had a tame translator under lock and key who turned French into English without respite, his chain never loosened nor his hunger satisfied until his task, for the time being, should be complete.

Our actors had at this time a permanent home in London, kept for them by Mitchell, the Bond Street bookseller, at the St. James's Theatre. Thence they made incursions upon all the others. Some years previously Madame Arnould Plessy, having taken into her head to act in the tongue of Shakespeare, Théophile Gautier had complimented her on the grace with which she had succeeded in "extracting English from her mouth." Others now attempted to emulate her accomplishment and to turn it to account. Fechter resolved not merely to play Hamlet, but to play as it had never been played before, and he did so to rounds of applause for seventy nights. An *ingénue*, escaped from the Comédie Française, made a similar effort in the rôle of Juliet, and despite her bad accent, and intolerable pretension, she was able to keep it up, thanks to powerful supporters, in the teeth of the quite excusable hostility of the pit. Things did not always pass off so harmlessly, and in more than one instance the brutal anger

of the public, as under Charles I., drove intruders from the stage, which it wished to see occupied by native actors alone.

As a matter of fact, there were some notable English actors and actresses at this time. Helen Faucit (now Lady Martin) preserved the pure diction of John and Charles Kemble. Charles Kean, despite his inadequate physique, won for himself gradually an honourable place on the stage over which his father had held sway. Ryder had a presence, and a sonorous voice, deep and hollow and tragic, like that of Beauvallet or of Maubant. Keeley was a massive man, who could act with subtlety; his wife, incisive, keen, *amère*, had a leaning towards the serious drama—towards the realistic even. Robson, a queer and wonderful little figure, made a mark in *le drame noir* and in outrageous caricature. Farren had made his *début* in old men's parts at eighteen, and played them for fifty years without advancing in his art a step, without introducing a shade of emotion or a touch of humanity into his effects. Charles Mathews impersonated impudent youth, just as Farren impersonated unpleasant and ridiculous old age. Elegant, lissome, light, mobile, Mathews skipped and fluttered and chirruped like a bird. In his old age he reminded me of Ravel, his contemporary, whose method and rôles offered some analogy with his.¹ Buckstone

¹ Charles Mathews played at the *Varietés*, in French, in *L'anglais timide*, an adaptation of *Cool as a Cucumber*, by Blanchard Jerrold.

made the Haymarket prosper for twenty years, where I saw him, secure in the favour of the public, with his colleague, Compton, whose speciality was a certain dryness of humour. Buckstone at this time had lost both his hearing and his memory. But what a sly look there was in his eye! How his mouth would twist and turn! What irony lurked in the expressive ugliness of that wrinkled old mask of his!

These good actors injured rather than served their art. They revelled in, and limited themselves to, their own speciality, exaggerated their idiosyncrasies day by day, and left them as a legacy to their imitators. The authors were too insignificant, did they see the danger, to oppose their will to that of Charles Mathews and Farren. They took their measures to order and tried to satisfy their patrons. Thus became gradually narrowed at once the field for invention and for observation. As substitutes for the infinity of living human types and characters, seven or eight *emplois*, as one may say, came into existence—*emplois* often further specified and characterised by the name of an actor. There was the low comedian and the light comedian, the villain and the heavy man. All diversities of women-kind were grouped into one of these four ticketed sections: the *ingénue*, the flirt, the chaperon, and the wicked woman. The valet of Comedy had become a rascally steward whose rogueries took on a certain aspect of Drama. There were two or three types of old men. There was the

surly old curmudgeon in whom the author vents his spleen, and who draws up eccentric wills. There is the old beau, cowardly and cynical, who in the last act marries his fiancée to his own son and swears to reform. And there is the old peasant who is descended in a straight line from the father of Pamela, always talking of his white hairs and his contempt for gold, and always greeting the traveller, who has been overtaken by a storm and has lost his way, with "Be welcome to my humble roof." The peasant, one need hardly remark, never existed. On the stage he has lived more than a hundred years. Hardly less indispensable to the comedy or the drama was the captain, the "man about town," addicted to drink, with a diamond pin resplendent in his tie, wearing salmon-coloured trousers, and top boots that he is always dusting with the end of his riding-whip. He represents the selfishness, the folly, and the insolence of the higher classes, as imagined by a man who has never been inside a drawing-room. Did he know Society at his finger-ends, the man would never think of painting it. He never paints from nature. He copies for the thousandth time from the old models, Sheridan and Goldsmith, or his new masters, Scribe and d'Ennery.

It was for the critics, one is inclined to say, to instruct the public, the actors, and the author. I am almost ashamed to tell of the pass to which dramatic criticism had come. A paragraph in an obscure corner, a quarter of a column on the more

important works,—that was about all the space the great newspapers accorded to the theatre. Dramatic criticism was a nocturnal calling that enjoyed a not too good repute, and was frowned on by respectable people and fathers of families. It was entrusted to tyros, who hoped by their good conduct to earn their advancement presently to the reporting staff in the police courts. The one writer undertook both drama and opera. Dramatic criticism and musical criticism, owing to the natural gifts which they require, are two absolutely different callings. What mattered it, however, to the writer, who was expected only to praise the pieces and the performers, without being too much of a bore?

John Oxenford, the critic of the *Times*, was sent for one morning to the office of the editor. In analysing a new piece he had criticised freely the performance of a certain actor, and the latter had addressed a letter of remonstrance to Mr. Delane. "These things," said the editor majestically to the writer,—“these things don't interest the general public, and I don't want the *Times* to become an arena for the discussion of the merits of Mr. This and Mr. That. So look here, my dear fellow, understand this well, and write me accounts of plays henceforth that won't bring me any more such letters. Do you see?” “I see,” said Oxenford. And thus it was, continues the teller of the story, that English literature lost pages which might have recalled the subtlety of Hazlitt in conjunction with the winning humour

of Charles Lamb. Henceforth Oxenford, a scholar who had translated the "Hellas" of Jacobi and the "Conversations" of Goethe with Eckermann, passed for a blighted and discouraged genius; though of this he gave no stronger proofs than an English version of the operetta, *Bon soir, Monsieur Pantalon*, a farce which I saw fall quite flat, and some articles on Molière. But you should have heard him in a bar-parlour with his pipe between his teeth, a bottle of port on the table, and facing him some interlocutor who was not Mr. Delane!

While the press critic neglected his duty, or was prevented from fulfilling it, the official censorship added one more to the troubles and obstacles which already hampered the progress of the stage. I may perhaps make some reference in this place to the origin of the Censorship, and to its scope and powers.

Some writers will have it that this institution, as it now exists, is but a survival of the office of Master of the Revels, which flourished under the Tudors and the first Stuarts. As a matter of fact, the censorship owes its existence to a law passed in the reign of George II.¹ It was instituted nominally for the protection of good behaviour, decency, and public order; in reality, to protect Walpole from the stings of Aristophanic comedy and to silence Fielding. A century and a half have elapsed since the fall of Walpole, and the censorship still exists, like that sentinel who

¹ 10 George II. cap. 19.

was stationed in an alley of Trarskoé Sélo to guard a rose, and who was still being relieved every two hours twenty-five years later. The law of 1843, which was by way of according liberty to the theatre, did not free it from the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain, whose powers were delimited, so to say, geographically, in the most curious manner, for it is impossible to understand why certain quarters of the Metropolis were placed outside the reach of his authority and submitted to the jurisdiction of the Justices of the Peace.

To all intents and purposes the powers of the Chamberlain are exercised by a gentleman who is styled the Examiner of Plays. Plays have to be submitted to him seven days before their production, and when he returns them with his signature he receives from the submitters of them fees of from £1 to £2, according to the number of acts. The author may not enter his presence. The manager alone has the privilege of contemplating his features, and of giving, or getting from him, verbal explanations. And even those communications are under the seal of secrecy. Above the examiner stands a kind of head of department, and above him the Chamberlain himself. When you have exhausted these three jurisdictions you can go no higher. Above the Lord Chamberlain, as above the Czar of All the Russias, there remains only Divine Justice, and to Divine Justice authors of vaudevilles and musical comedies cannot very well appeal. The censor-

ship indeed is an absurd anomaly, the sole irresponsible and secret authority which remains in English legislation.

If you seek to discover how it has acted during this century, you will find that according as the censor was indolent or zealous his office has been a nullity or a nuisance. In theatrical circles that censor will not soon be forgotten who suppressed the word "thigh" as dangerous to public morals, and who exorcised from a play by Douglas Jerrold, as disrespectful to religion, the following phrase:—"He plays the violin like an angel!" The same censor found these words in a tragedy:—"I do homage to pride, debauchery, avarice! . . . Never!" He hastened to delete this, admitting thus by implication that English society, which it was his mission to protect, was compact of these three heinous characteristics.

It was forbidden to make fun of Holloway's ointment, for Mr. Holloway was "an estimable manufacturer who employs thousands of workmen." It was forbidden to put a comic bishop on the stage—unless it were a colonial bishop, in which case the censor would give his sanction. A play founded on *Oliver Twist* was forbidden because it was calculated to incite to crime, but it was allowed for a benefit performance; whence it would appear that it is allowable to incite the audience to crime on such special occasions. This poor censorship, which has to read everything, which has to supervise everything,—from

the rages of Othello to the grimaces of the clown and the tights of the ballet girls,—which has to uphold at once the constitution and propriety, to defend at once the Divinity and Mr. Holloway, loses its head over it all at last, and reminds one of the *bourgeois* broken loose who is being launched at carnival time into some dizzying Saraband.

Its most absorbing task is that of barring the way against French immorality. Its vigilance is eluded, however, by a kind of conventional terminology. Where our authors have had the effrontery to write the word “cocotte” in black and white, they replace it by the word “actress.” Where we have unblushingly written “adultery,” they have inserted “flirtation.” The censor gives his sanction and pockets his fees, and on the performance of the piece the by-play of the actor and actresses completes the translation, re-establishing if not reinforcing the original sense.

In the midst of all these difficulties the growth of the theatre-going public had made necessary long series of performances, long runs as we call them now, unknown up till then and inaugurated by the new theatres. There were a dozen in 1847, twenty in 1860. The calling of dramatic author began to grow lucrative and to tempt many writers. It was an easy calling, too, as the public was young and ignorant, ready to accept anything, and as, in addition, the French drama offered an almost inexhaustible amount of raw material. They had recourse to it unceasingly,

just as Robinson Crusoe after his shipwreck used to return to his ship in order to look for some tool ! I shall not give a long list of names because, unless accompanied by a short personal sketch and a few words of criticism, these names, obscure or even unknown, would mean nothing to French readers, and would be almost as wearisome as the long lists of warriors in the epics of olden times. Amongst the more notable, I may mention Tom Taylor and Dion Boucicault. Tom Taylor belonged to both the world of law and the world of letters. Briefs gave him his dinner, the drama gave him his supper ; his supper got to be the more substantial of the two. From 1850 to 1875 he seems to have achieved ubiquity. His name was on every poster. He was facile, had a certain method in his work, a certain skill in putting his plays together, a certain discretion which passed for taste—in fine, all the qualities that go to form a painstaking and prolific mediocrity. He would probably have wished to be judged on the merits of the historical dramas which absorbed his whole activity during the concluding years of his life, and in which he thought he was achieving “literature.” But are they really historical dramas? They contain at once too much history and too little. The historical document is all-pervasive, enters into every scene, interrupts the action ; but anything like historical psychology, any attempt to get at the real character of the personages presented, is wholly unattempted. It was characteristic

of him that, when desiring to depict Queen Elizabeth, he relied upon some romantic stories by a German lady instead of going to the work of Froude (far more dramatic than his own drama), where he could have learned all he required to know.

Dion Boucicault, the other writer whom I have singled out as representative of the lot, had more character and was more interesting. He was an actor, and an actor of some talent. He knew no other world than that of the theatre—the world which from eight o'clock till midnight laughs and cries, curses and makes love, dies and murders, under the gaslight, behind three sets of painted canvas. Without any real culture, and without having the least critical faculty, Boucicault had read everything about the theatre—read everything and remembered everything, good, bad, and indifferent, from *Phormio* to the *Auberge des Adrets*. He knew by heart all the *croix de mère* of modern melodrama, and from his mass of reminiscences he concocted his crazy-quilt-like plays, imitating involuntarily, unconsciously. He was plagiarism incarnate. In his first great success, *London Assurance*, you may find not only Goldsmith and Sheridan, but Terence and Plautus, who had reached him by way of Molière. You will meet in it a father who speaks to his son without recognising him, or who at least is persuaded not to recognise him; a young lady who boxes her husband's ears and calls him her doll; a master who makes a confidant of his valet, a valet

as untruthful as Dave or Scapin ; a lawyer who is anxious to get himself thrashed like *L'Intimé* ; a young drunkard and debauchee who falls in love with a country lass ; and a young girl brought up in the wilds, who replies to the first compliment she has paid her—"It strikes me, sir, that you are a stray bee from the hive of fashion. If so, reserve your honey for its proper cell. A truce to compliments." The piece goes from vulgarity to vulgarity, from absurdity to absurdity. Within a few minutes there is a ridiculous abduction, a comic duel and a hardly less comic marriage, all brought about by a will which is surely the most absurd of all the absurd wills known to the drama. The piece had its central figure in a clever humbug whom no one knows. "Will you allow me to ask you," says Charles Courtly in the last scene, "an impertinent question?"

"With the greatest pleasure."

"Who the devil are you?"

"On my faith, I don't know. But I must be a gentleman." Upon which another character concludes the play with a pedantic definition of the word "gentleman," and morality is satisfied.

One fine day—it was in 1860—this playwright, who lived by borrowing, and who was in debt to every literature, had the singular good fortune to create a *genre* of his own. Perhaps it is too much to say create. A compatriot of his, Edmund Falconer, like himself an actor as well as an author, had opened the way for him. But Falconer never again met with the success which

greeted *Peep o' Day*, and he wound up with the memorable failure of *The Oonagh*.¹ Boucicault, on the contrary, was able to exploit for twenty years the fruitful vein upon which he had happened in the *Colleen Bawn*.

The *Colleen Bawn* is a tissue of improbabilities and extravagances. What is the mysterious reason why we can put up with these absurdities and take an interest in them? It is, I think, that there is in this crack-brained drama a kind of ethnographic seed which enters into the mind and takes root there. The sad, patient, uncomplaining struggle of this poor peasant girl to become worthy of the man she loves,—her discouragement, which yet cannot exhaust her devotion,—all this is depicted by touches so suggestive and so strong that an elaborate analysis could not do more. But there is something beyond this. A sort of primitive poetry seemed to play round the whole character of the *Colleen Bawn* as she appeared thirty-five years ago in the person of Mrs. Dion Boucicault, with her little red cloak, her long black hair, and her expression half sad, half seductive—smiling through her tears like an angel in disgrace.

¹ In *Thirty Years at the Play*, Clement Scott gives an account of the first night of *The Oonagh*, which has come down to us as a tradition. At two o'clock in the morning the play was still in progress. The house was empty save for a few critics slumbering in their stalls. The actors were on the stage all in a line facing the public, as was then the custom, and there was no sign of the ending, when suddenly the machinists pulled back the carpet on which the chief characters were standing. They collapsed simply!—with the piece, which was never brought to its real conclusion.

Until Boucicault's time it had been the fashion to laugh over Ireland, never to weep over her. He brought about this change without depicting his country otherwise than as she really existed. He knew the strange feeling of England towards Ireland, the feeling of a man for a woman, devoid of the refinements of philosophy and civilisation. Passionate, violent, hard, England begins by crushing Ireland ; then stops, conquered by the weakness of the victim, subjugated by a charm which no mere words can describe. Boucicault sought out this sentiment in the depths of the hearts of his English audiences, and ministered to it ; and was instrumental thereby in preparing the way for an age of justice and generosity. Under the commonness of the means which he employed, and often also of the sentiments and ideas which he expressed, Boucicault hid a sort of subtlety which was born of instinct. His Irish psychology is true to life, and although he added many touches in the *Shaugraun*, in *Arrah-na-pogue*, in *The Octoroon*, in *Michael O'Dowd*, and in other works, it may be said to be already complete in *The Colleen Bawn*. When Myles-na-Coppaleen tells us, “I was full of sudden death that minute,” and when Eily speaks of the little bird that sings in her heart, the passion does not strike us as exaggerated nor the poetry as out of place. Father Tom, too, who smokes his pipe and drinks his potheen with the smugglers, but who can assume at will his authority as an apostle and a leader, is the personification of the Irish priest of old, and indeed

of our own day too—at once the man of the people and the man of God.

Altogether, one cannot but exclaim, as one looks at this crude but striking piece—this is Ireland! The Ireland of zealots and traitors, of rebels and the meek, of madmen and martyrs, of heroes and assassins. Ireland the irrational and illogical, who disconcerts our sympathies after winning them, and who has doubtless still further surprises in store for History, already at a loss how to record her actions, how to explain her character, what verdict to pronounce upon her.

CHAPTER III

The Vogue of Burlesque—Burnand's *Ixion*—H. J. Byron—The Influence of Burlesque upon the Moral Tone of the Stage—Marie Wilton's *début*—A Letter from Dickens—Founding of the "Prince of Wales's"—Tom Robertson, his Life as Actor and Author—His Journalistic Career—London Bohemia in 1865—Sothorn.

THE taste, the rage for Burlesque, dates from almost the same moment as the introduction of the Boucicault drama. The two things have, however, nothing else in common, unless it be that neither one nor the other pertains to literature. Burlesque is the English form, under an un-English name, of that kind of musical parody in which we French used at that time to delight, and of which the operetta was born. In London this exotic *genre* became quickly acclimatised by success.

I shall take Burnand's *Ixion* as a type, for by reason of its never-ending popularity it may be regarded as a masterpiece of its kind. It is in verse. What kind of verse may be imagined when I add that almost every line contains at least one pun. The subject is a matter of no consequence; the whole point of the piece consists in putting modern sentiments and expressions into

the mouths of characters taken from antiquity. The people rebel and burn Ixion's palace. Jupiter appears in answer to his invocation. "Are you insured?" he inquires. "Yes," replies Ixion, "with all the best Insurance Agencies. But you see, when it comes to paying you the money, they let you whistle for it." Jupiter invites him to come to Olympus. "We lunch at half-past one. Don't forget." Mercury, charged to conduct Ixion thither, hails an aerial omnibus. "Come on for Olympus! Room for one outside!" We are shown Olympus. The meal is nearly over. Juno asks Venus the name of her dressmaker, and sends a servant to tell "the Master" that "coffee is served." Neptune talks nautical lingo like the hero of *Black-eyed Susan*, and goes nowhere unaccompanied by a French sailor and an English Jack-Tar, who are themselves bosom friends. The Frenchman executes a hornpipe out of good-fellowship towards his mate, whilst the Englishman expresses his regard for "La France" by performing the cancan. Apollo plays an English sun to the life—he never shows himself. He remains shut up in his office with his secretary, the Clerk of the Weather, who, like all his kind, scribbles verses and newspaper articles on paper bearing the Government stamp.

Add to all this a bit of music here and there, a number of pretty girls scantily attired, notably nine Muses and three Graces, whose dress and dancing would have brought the author of the *Histriomastrix* in sorrow to the grave, and

allusions to all the topics of the day—to the victory of the horse “Gladiator,” to *Lady Audley’s Secret* (then all the rage), to vivisection, to the novels of Charles Kingsley, to the fountain in Trafalgar Square, to Mudie’s Circulating Library, —and a thousand other things which to-day have ceased not merely to be amusing, but to be intelligible.

To read *Ixion*, as I read it thirty-five years after its first production, to read it sitting by the fire on a foggy afternoon, making one’s way as best one might through the thicket of allusions which had become enigmas, and through all the *débris* of these used-up fireworks, was a singularly dismal undertaking. To form any just impression of the piece, you must try to picture to yourself the little theatre (The Royalty) on the occasion of the First Night, the thousand or so of spectators, who have dined well and who incline to an optimistic view of things in general, the pervading odour of the *poudre de riz*, the *flonflons* of the orchestra, the quivering of the gasaliers and of the dazzling electric light, the diamonds, the gleaming white shoulders and the soft silk tights, the superabundance of animal life and high spirits which seem almost to glow like kindling firewood. A débutante destined to a higher kind of success, Ada Cavendish, regaled the opera-glasses with the sight of her beauty as Venus. Another attraction was to be found later in the appearance on the stage of a member of a great family, the Hon. Lewis W. Wingfield, who impersonated (with

the contortions of a madman) the Goddess of Wisdom.

But the real home of Burlesque was the Strand, then under the management of Mrs. Swanborough, famous for her incessant conflicts with English grammar. Her wants were provided for by Henry James Byron, a good-looking fellow who appeared in his own pieces, but not to great advantage. It used to be said that he was a descendant of Lord Byron. How is this genealogical mystery to be solved? I have been unable to find a clue to it. Theatrical folk are no great scholars, they take but little note of dates, and they are apt to treat history in a somewhat offhand fashion. For them Lord Byron was lost in the mists of antiquity, and it was easy for them to believe that their colleague, born about 1830, might have had him for an ancestor. Whatever his origin, H. J. Byron was an actor, and had begun on the lowest steps of the profession, with engagements at ten shillings a week, and even less. Suddenly he struck a vein of success in the writing of burlesques, and thenceforth he wrote as much as ever one could wish, and even more,—so much so that the list of his works, were I to print it here, would fill many pages. He did not worry himself about a subject. A subject was a nuisance, he held; you had to keep to it, and work it up,—you have to give it a beginning and an ending. Hang the subject! He thought only of the witticisms with which his burlesque should be stocked. He collected them

together in notebooks which in time must have come to rival the volume of Larousse's Dictionary. In the street he would follow up some comic notion, jot it down on an envelope or on his sleeve, or on the margin of a newspaper, using his hat as a writing-desk, or else making shift with a wall. One day he was writing up against a hall door. The door opened, and in rolled Byron on top of an old lady who had been making her way out. He got up again smiling just as he would from his mishaps in the theatre. He was possessed with the demon of punning, which never left him an instant's peace. Having failed as a manager in the provinces, he made puns upon his bankruptcy. He punned in the last moments before his death. Is it not one of the rules of his profession to bring down the curtain on a witticism?

Byron used to boast that he had never given offence to delicate ears. And, as a matter of fact, he said a million of nonsensical things but not a single indecent thing. Yet he helped to depreciate the moral tone of the theatre by lowering the standard of decency in regard to female costume upon the stage, and by bringing on to it those pseudo-actresses whom, in the slang of the green-room, we call *grues*.

In this connection I ought to point out that the social ostracism under which the stage then suffered was due less to the bad morals of the actresses than to the bad manners and vulgarity of the actors. The former were much nearer to

being ladies than the latter were to being gentlemen. Watched and warded, first by a father, then by a husband connected with the theatre, obliged to give their first thoughts to their professional and domestic duties, they had neither the power, nor the leisure, nor the inclination to think of evil. Tom Hood, in his *Model Men and Women*, paints a picture of the theatrical woman which reminds one of the biographies of the *Prix Montyon*. She goes late to bed, rises early, learns her rôles while washing her children's linen, rehearses in the afternoon, performs in the evening, and has no time to eat or to attend to her *toilette*, still less to think, or make merry, or make love. "School mistresses and governesses, shop-girls, dressmakers, cooks, housemaids,—what are your fatigues to those of an actress?" So spoke a writer¹ who was well acquainted with theatrical life.

These habits were now to be changed. Burlesque, pantomime, comic opera, were throwing open the stage to actresses of a new type who posed but did not perform, and who were called upon to fill not rôles but tights. The respectable woman would not suffer herself to be vanquished on her own ground; she competed with the newcomers by the same means: sometimes she won—and lost. This was the transformation which Byron abetted. But it was the public, of course, as always, that was most to blame.

Poor Byron was not without the ambition of

¹ T. W. Robertson in *The Illustrated Times*.

an artist : he aspired to raising himself above the level of the *genre* to which he owed his first success, — to writing a comedy. And it so happened that by his side on the stage of the Strand there was a quaint little body whose hopes ran parallel with his. This was Marie Wilton. I do not know how old she was then. In her pleasant Memoirs, written in collaboration with her husband, she has quite forgotten to give us the date of her birth. So much we know, however, that she was the child of somewhat obscure actors, and that she herself made her *début* when she was five years old. At Manchester she had the honour of playing some small rôle with Macready, who was then making his last rounds before finally quitting the stage. The great tragedian sent for her to his dressing-room, lifted her on to his knee and questioned her.

"I suppose," he said, "that you want to become a great actress?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what rôle are you most anxious to play?"

"Juliet."

Macready burst out laughing. "Then," said he, "you'll have to change those eyes of yours!"

Marie Wilton did not change her eyes, but she changed her ideas, which was an easier matter. At fifteen she was acting fearlessly in every kind of rôle. One evening she (who was too young, they thought, to assume the rôle of any of

Shakespeare's heroines) impersonated the old mother of Claude Melnotte in *The Lady of Lyons*.

It was in Bristol that they began to realise that there was something in her. An actor on tour, then very well known, Charles Dillon, was playing *Belphegor*, a monstrous emotional drama,¹ the hero of which was an acrobat. Marie Wilton, in the rôle of a little boy, had to give him the cue in one of the great scenes. She hit on a little piece of business, and risked it at the rehearsal. The London actor lost his temper at first, then reflected, questioned the little actress, listened to her explanations, and finally gave in. The public was carried away. Dillon remembered this, and when he returned to London he engaged Marie Wilton at the Lyceum. Here she made her real *début* towards the end of 1858. *Belphegor* was followed by a farce in which Marie Wilton had also a rôle. On the same evening, at the same theatre, in the same piece, there appeared for the first time in London, John Toole, the king of English low comedians. With these two names we come to the living generation, and have to deal at last with the contemporary stage.

But let us first follow Marie Wilton, for her little barque, though none had any inkling of it, not even she herself, carries with it the destinies of the English Comedy still to be born.

From the Lyceum she passed to the Hay-

¹ Founded on the famous French play *Paillasse*.

market, where she was treated as a spoiled child by the three old men who there held sway. She played Cupid here with so much verve, point, impudence and sprightliness, that other Cupids were created for her. This is the public all over ; naïvely selfish, it condemns the actor to maintain for a quarter of a century the posture which has taken its fancy, to repeat unceasingly the gesture or the tone which has amused or touched it. Marie Wilton had played the Haymarket Cupid for ever had she not betaken herself to the Strand. Here she was the inevitable principal boy of the burlesques.

For some time past Mrs. Bancroft has played only when in the mood and at long intervals, and has not felt inclined for the exertion of carrying a whole piece on her shoulders a whole evening as of yore. I have seen her only in two subsidiary rôles, and for an estimate of her talents I must rely upon other judgments than my own. M. Coquelin thinks that she reminds one at once of Alphonsine and of Chaumont, and that she holds a middle place between the two. But M. Coquelin had in his mind, when he was writing, an actress of more than forty, appearing in the rôle of eccentric ladies of fashion. There is a gulf between this and the imp of 1860 who rattled across the boards of the Strand. All that I know of her at the time of her *début* is that she had still those twinkling merry eyes which forbade her to attempt tragedy, and the figure of a child of twelve,—a figure so slight that

when the man who was to marry her first saw her, he declared she was the thinnest actress in London. But here is a letter which will place Marie Wilton before our eyes as she was when the barristers of the Inns of Court made verses in her honour and half Aldershot came to town every second night to applaud her. It is from Charles Dickens to John Forster :—

“ I escaped at half-past seven and went to the Strand Theatre ; having taken a stall beforehand, for it is always crammed. I really wish you would go, between this and next Thursday, to see the *Maid and the Magpie* burlesque there. There is the strangest thing in it that ever I have seen on the stage. The boy, Pippo, by Miss Wilton. While it is astonishingly impudent (must be, or it couldn't be done at all), it is so stupendously like a boy, and unlike a woman, that it is perfectly free from offence. I never have seen such a thing. Priscilla Horton as a boy, not to be thought of beside it. She does an imitation of the dancing of the Christy Minstrels — wonderfully clever — which in the audacity of its thorough-going is surprising. A thing that you *can not* imagine a woman's doing at all ; and yet the manner, the appearance, the levity, impulse and spirits of it, are so exactly like a boy, that you cannot think of anything like her sex in association with it. It begins at eight, and is over by a quarter-past nine. I never have seen such a curious thing, and the

girl's talent is unchallengeable. I call her the cleverest girl I have ever seen on the stage in my time, and the most singularly original."

But Miss Wilton was sick and tired of Pippo no less than of the Cupids. She begged of all the managers to let her play the rôle of a heroine in long dresses. They turned a deaf ear to her. Buckstone said to her, "I shall never see you otherwise than in the part of this wicked little scamp."

Every evening she set her audiences in roars and every afternoon she spent in tears over her lot. When one day her married sister said to her—

"As the managers won't have you, take a theatre yourself."

"But I have no money."

"I'll lend you money," said her brother-in-law.

A partnership between Byron and Miss Wilton was the immediate result. *He* brought his reputation and his puns. *She* the £1000 which was not hers.

A theatre had now to be found. Near Tottenham Court Road, one of the noisiest and commonest quarters of the town, there was a squalid, miserable-looking street where ill-fed and ill-famed Frenchmen were at this time beginning to congregate; and in it there was a place of entertainment where all sorts of things had been achieved, but bankruptcy oftenest of all.

Frédéric Lemaitre had played Napoleon there in French, and had in this capacity passed in review some half-dozen supers who stood for the "Grande Armée" and who cried "Viv' l'Emprou!" The house bore the high-sounding name of the "Queen's Theatre," but the people of the neighbourhood called it the "Dust-Hole," and in doing so proved their acquaintance with it. The aristocratic seats were a shilling, and when the Stalls had dined well they were given to bombarding the Boxes with orange peel.

It was now cleaned, restored, freshened up at an outlay more of pains than of money. The "Dust-Hole" was transformed into a blue and white *bonbonnière*. The little manageress did not spare herself, and on the evening of the first night, whilst the *queue* was already forming outside the door of the theatre, she was busy hammering in a last nail. What would have been said by the devotees of fashion, wandering in the muddy Tottenham Street, and astonished at finding themselves in such a locality, had they seen their favourite squatting on a stool, hammer in hand?

The company she had gathered round her consisted of Byron, John Clarke, transplanted from the Strand, Fanny Josephs—an actress of delicate and agreeable talent, the excellent *duègne* Larkin, and two other sisters Wilton. It included also a tall young man of twenty-four who had not previously acted in London, and who was not therefore of any interest to the

public, though to his manageress he was ; his name was Bancroft.

He was a gentleman by birth, breeding, and bearing. But, his family being ruined, he had followed the vocation which led him to the stage. In four and a half years he had played four hundred and forty-six rôles. In one engagement of thirty-six days in Dublin he had played forty. This hard life as a provincial comedian had broken him into his business. Tall and slender, he owed a sort of air of distinction combined with stiffness to his short sight and to his stature. The rendering of cool, well-bred nonchalance came naturally to him, but in the depth of his eye there lurked a gleam of irrepressible humour. He had spent much time in observing and reflecting, he knew much more of things than did his colleagues, and he felt vaguely conscious of possessing qualities which had only to be drawn out. And now fortune, in the guise of a young girl, had come to him and taken him by the hand.

Thus there was both ambition and love in the air that April evening in 1865 when the little "Prince of Wales's" opened its door as wide as it could. In order not to startle the public or disturb its habits, a burlesque and a comedy were offered it pending the preparation of the new repertory. Marie Wilton's friends supported her in their hundreds, but their sympathies were soon to be lost. The pieces themselves were almost worthless ; Byron would seem to have lost his *verve* during the removal. Something

new had to be found for the autumn. It was then that Robertson was thought of.

Thomas William, or more familiarly, Tom Robertson, was at this time next door to a failure. He was thirty-six, and was fighting an uphill fight against ill-fortune with a desperation that was growing into rancour. The son, grandson, and great-grandson of actors, he had passed the first years of his life in a touring company in the midst of those *bourgeois* vagabonds whose joys and sorrows I have endeavoured to depict. His father had been manager of the company which worked on the Lincoln circuit, and had ended by giving it up. Tom himself had appeared upon the boards whilst still a child, but, as it would seem, without giving evidence of any remarkable talents. Later, his speciality was the taking off of foreigners—a sorry means of inciting to laughter for a man of intellect. In fine, though there are some who would fain mislead us in the matter, it is clear that Robertson was but a second-rate actor.

At the age of nineteen, on the strength of a newspaper advertisement, Robertson set out for Holland to secure a place as usher or junior master in a boarding school. After unspeakable misadventures, of which he talked afterwards quite merrily, and curious experiences which must have been useful to him in his capacity of dramatist, he was despatched home by a good-natured consul, and took up his actor's life again with its three rôles and one meal a day. In 1851 we find

him in London trying to earn a livelihood. He has written one piece, *A Night's Adventure*, which by a lucky chance has been accepted and performed. But it fails. He has a quarrel with Farren, the manager, who has produced it, his only employer; and behold! he is again at sea. Now he comes to the assistance of his father, who is making desperate efforts to keep open a suburban theatre. Anon he is fulfilling insignificant engagements here and there. He goes to Paris with a company which gets paid on the first Saturday and never again. He becomes prompter at the Olympic. He translates French plays, writes farces, produces a heap of wretched stuff for which he cannot always find a market. When hunger drives him to it, he sells his "copy" for a few shillings to a bookseller, of whom it is difficult to say whether he was merely a shrewd man of business or a friend in need. For, after all, to the recipient these shillings meant his daily bread, and the bookseller was not always sure of reimbursing himself.

He has introduced into one of his comedies a bitter memory of his beginnings as a dramatist of the objections which met him everywhere. The speaker is a composer of music. "In England, yesterday is always considered so much better than to-day—last week so superior to this—and this week so superior to the week after next—and thirty years ago so much more brilliant an era than the present. . . . I shall explain myself better if I give my own personal reasons for making a crusade

against age. In this country I find age so respected, so run after, so courted, so worshipped, that it becomes intolerable. I compose music ; I wish to sell it. I go to a publisher and tell him so ; he looks at me and says, ' You look so young,' in the same tone that he would say, You look like an impostor or a pickpocket. I apologise as humbly as I can for not having been born fifty years earlier, and the publisher, struck by my contrition, thinks to himself, Poor young man, after all, he cannot help being so young, and addressing me as if I were a baby, says, ' My dear sir, very likely your compositions may have merit—I don't dispute it—but, you see, Mr. So-and-So, aged sixty, and Mr. Such-an-one, aged seventy, and Mr. T'other, aged eighty, and Mr. Somebody, aged ninety, write for us ; and the public are accustomed to their productions, and we make it a rule never to give the world anything written by a man under fifty-five years old. Go away now, and keep to your work for the next thirty years ; during that time exert yourself to get older—you will succeed if you try hard ; turn grey, be bald—it's not a bad substitute—lose your teeth, your health, your vigour, your fire, your freshness, your genius,—in one short word, your terrible, abominable youth, and some day or other, if you don't die in the interim, you may have the chance of being a great man.' "

As though in obedience to this ironical advice, Tom was already almost old after fifteen years of so dreadful an existence. His handsome face had assumed a melancholy cast which it was

never to lose. Once in the depth of his misery he took it into his head to enlist. The army would have nothing to say to him. Then, recklessly, he married a beautiful girl who imagined she had a vocation for the stage. Children came, but neither success nor money. She died, and Robertson then tried his hand at journalism. He tried to "place" work of every kind wherever he could, from riddles and comic anecdotes of a dozen lines up to serial stories. He got connected with a score of London and provincial papers—the *Porcupine*, of Liverpool; the *Comic News*; the *Wag*, which his friend Byron had started; *Fun*, just started by Tom Hood, and the *Illustrated Times*, on which he succeeded Edmund Yates as dramatic critic, and in whose columns, under the title of "The Theatrical Lounger," he sketched the features of the whole stage-world from leading actor to fireman and call-boy. It is all written with easy, familiar humour, with a spice of impudence thrown in, not unlike the style of our old weekly *Figaro*; at the same time, it is observant, natural, alive, with here and there a gust of passion and a vent of spleen.

Robertson lived in the very centre of Bohemia—that vaguely-defined district in which "men of the world" whom the "world" bored, among them officers who found the military clubs too solemn, came to drink and make merry with the night-birds of the law, the theatre, and the press. They would meet at the Garrick, the Arundel, the Savage, the Fielding, of which last Albert Smith

has left us a description in mock-heroic verse. Tom Hood, a clerk in the War Office, and editor of *Fun*, used to give Friday supper-parties—frugal meals, just cold meat and boiled potatoes. But those who met there, Clement Scott tells us, were the best fellows in the world.

Conversation flowed until daybreak in a kind of torrent. It still flowed as the guests made their way homewards at the hours when the carts of the market gardeners began to rumble through Knightsbridge and the rising sun to gild the tree-tops of Hyde Park.

Were they all such very “good fellows”?—I have my doubts. This Bohemia was not a country where everyone was young and kindly and gay. It was just a backwater, or a little world apart where one talked instead of working, and where night took the place of day; it was the ante-chamber to the real world of literature, a place of impatient waitings, of feverish suspense. I am sure there were half a dozen malcontents and failures there for one man who could claim success.

These lines¹ of Robert Brough (one of the most characterised members of the body, one of the first to disappear from it), written by him on his birthday, give an instructive glimpse at the life—

“I’m twenty-nine! I’m twenty-nine!

I’ve drank too much of beer and wine;

¹ To the fourth line he added a footnote to the effect that the name was *not* Johnson really.

I've had too much of toil and strife,
I've given a kiss to Johnson's wife,
And sent a lying note to mine,—
I'm twenty-nine! I'm twenty-nine!"

After having written a few newspaper articles and two or three plays, Brough grew embittered at not having attained wealth and fame. That he should have failed to do so seemed a sufficient indication of the infamy of society. He wrote and published the "Songs of the Governing Classes," the satire of which is as corrosive as vitriol, as scalding as molten lead. The "Song of the Gentleman" in particular might well be given a place in the anarchist anthologies of the future.

Something of this bitterness was to find its way into the impassioned outbursts of Robertson and the philosophic irony of Gilbert. But at these nocturnal repasts of Hood's, at which Robertson was one of the most brilliant, fearless, and entralling of talkers, there was question not so much of reconstituting society as of renewing art and reforming the theatre. They ridiculed the wretched stage management of the day, the fatuity of the comedians of the old school, the tyranny of conventional routine,—everything connected with the stage. And what was it they had to offer in place of the old order? Truth more carefully observed, nature more closely followed. It is always the same ideals, or the same pretensions: the generation which holds them up against its

senior never seems to suspect that its junior may invoke them against itself.

Pending the consummation of these great projects, Robertson had had acted at the Strand in 1861 a little play called *The Cantab*, which achieved a sort of success. He offered another burlesque to Mrs. Swanborough but she refused it. Then came a stroke of luck. Sothern, who was at this time attracting all London in a piece by Tom Taylor entitled, *Our American Cousin*, heard tell of a piece which Robertson had written. Sothern, who was getting sick of the inexhaustible popularity of Lord Dundreary, was anxious to appear before the public in the rôle of David Garrick. He was anxious to get completely away from the field of caricature, to play a really serious part which should bring out all his gifts. Unluckily the piece had not much success, nor did it merit much. It was an adaptation from the French with Garrick substituted for the original French hero. Strange beginning for one who aimed at a "Return to Truth," this sticking of a historic head upon the shoulders of "a gentleman unknown"!

It was after this that he wrote his comedy *Society*. He took it to Buckstone, who refused it flatly. "My dear fellow," he said, "your piece wouldn't reach a fourth performance." The author went off, fingers twitching, beyond himself with rage, and wandered into the Strand, where one of his friends met him. "Look here," said Robertson to him, "here is a capital play and these asses won't have it." A provincial manager

took it up. It succeeded in Liverpool. Marie Wilton secured it and produced it on November 14, 1861, at her little theatre. From that evening dates not only the success of the Prince of Wales's Theatre, but a new era for English Comedy—the era of Robertson.

CHAPTER IV

First Performance of *Society*—Success of *Ours*, *Caste*, and *School*—How Robertson turned to account the Talent of his Actors, John Hare, Bancroft, and Mrs. Bancroft—Progress in the Matter of Scenery—Dialogue and Character-drawing—Robertson as a Humorist: a scene from *School*—As a Realist: a scene from *Caste*—The Comedian of the Upper Middle Classes—Robertson's Marriage, Illness, and Death—The "Cup and Saucer" Comedy—The Improvement in Actors' Salaries—The Bancrofts at the Haymarket—Farewell Performance—My Pilgrimage to Tottenham Street.

THAT evening of the 14th of November has been described to us by several eye-witnesses, so that we are able to realise the feelings that prevailed both on the stage and amongst the audience. The first act seemed gay and lively, with a sort of mordant raillery in it with which the audience was unfamiliar. Then came an idyll, evolving amidst the trees of a London square. What! love—youthful, tender, tremulous love—in the very heart of this city of mud, fog, and smoke! Love, so near that you might touch his wings! This was the kind of impression it evoked—an impression that pleased and moved the more, that the public, always over-curious concerning the private life of its favourites, was acquainted with the tender relations of actor and actress. It

was a real “honeymoon”—the full moon which shone on this love duet from over the shrubbery of coloured canvas. The hearts of the audience went out to them, and all was well.

But no one could say what sort of reception was in store for “The Owls’ Roost.” This “roost” was a picture from the life of the clubs which I have already described as the principal resorts of Bohemia. Now, the “Savages”—the members, that is, of the Savage Club—as well as the frequenters of the Garrick, the Fielding, and the Arundel, were all there in force. How would they take this caricature of themselves? The laughter which broke out in uninterrupted peals soon reassured the anxious ears behind the scenes.

There is a point at which one of the chief characters is at a loss for half a crown wherewith to pay for the hansom in which he is going off to a ball. Having no money in his pocket he asks a friend for the sum. “I haven’t got it,” the friend replies, “but I’ll see if I can’t get it for you.” He asks a third, who makes a similar reply; and so the appeal makes the whole round of the club, until at last a half-crown is found in the depths of a pocket, and is passed on from hand to hand, borrowed and lent a dozen times, to the man who had asked for it in the first instance. The incident was taken from actual life. Thus reproduced upon the stage, it seemed indescribably comic, and proved the turning-point in the fortune of the play—the happy crisis after

which everything was greeted with applause. It was a trivial illustration, but it was thoroughly characteristic. It was Bohemia in a nutshell—to have nothing and give everything.

As the “owls” were so much diverted by the faithful portrayal of their resorts and of their customs, thus presented for the first time upon the stage, there was no reason to expect that Society would take offence over the extraordinary and incongruous proceedings at the establishment of Lord and Lady Ptarmigant. This kind of comic libel was not unknown;—Bulwer, for instance, had set himself to depict the union of the old aristocracy with the new, the naïve veneration displayed by Riches for Rank, and on the other hand, the prostration of Rank before Riches. No one showed astonishment at seeing Lady Ptarmigant smilingly take the arm of old Chodd, though his language and his manners were those of a costermonger, and though his lordship’s valet would probably have hesitated about letting himself be seen with him in a public-house. As for Lord Ptarmigant himself, he was just what we call a *panne*. The whole character resolved itself into a mere eccentricity, as monotonous as it was far-fetched and extravagant,—a habit of dragging about his chair with him wherever he went, and of falling asleep in it the moment he sat down, with the result that everyone who came in or went out could not fail to tumble over his stretched-out old legs. Who would have imagined that such a rôle as this

would be one of the causes of the success of the piece, and would be the means of revealing to London an admirable actor? His name was John Hare. He was still quite young, and he had wished for this strange rôle in which to made his *début*. Profiting by the example of Garrick, Hare had realised that an actor does not make his name by giving out a witticism or telling phrase with effect, but by putting before us a live human figure, if only a silent figure, in all its eccentricity of brain. His facial expression was wonderful, and his mimicry excellent;—he had in him the genius of metamorphosis; he has it still, and gives evidence of it in a hundred different rôles. By a sort of intuition not easy to explain, there was hardly a spectator who did not divine the future great actor from this one performance.

The success of *Society*—it lasted for one hundred and fifty nights—was followed almost at once by the success of *Ours*, which lasted still longer, and filled the theatrical season 1866–67. Then came *Caste* in 1867 and 1868. *School* in 1869 surpassed its predecessors in popularity, being played nearly four hundred times. In the intervals between these four great triumphs there were two pieces which, without achieving so long a run, still maintained in the fortunate little theatre the same joyous atmosphere of success.

When the “Prince of Wales’s,” however, had recourse to any other than its regular caterer, a check in its fortunes was sure to come, and there

was no alternative to falling back on Robertson. And when Robertson tried his fortune elsewhere, even when supported by a popularity so well established as that of Sothern, the result was invariably but a *succès d'estime*, when not a disastrous failure. From these circumstances a certain superstition grew up. Superstitions are rife in the theatrical world. Marie Wilton, it was felt, had her lucky star, and Robertson had his, but the two had to be in conjunction for their benign influence to be exerted. Perhaps the coincidence may be explained without having recourse to the stars. Tom Taylor, on the day after a new triumph, wrote to the young manageress: "The author and the theatre, the actors and the rôles, all seem made for one another." This was quite true, and it may be added, that the public and the time were in harmony with the spirit of the pieces and the talent of the performers. Everything had come about as it should; so it was called chance!

Robertson was not much of an actor, but he was a wonderful reader. When you heard Robertson read one of his comedies, Clement Scott tells us, you understood it in all its details. Under the sway of his moving elocution the actors laughed and cried. The author knew their weaknesses and their gifts better than they themselves; he knew, therefore, how to make the most of the peculiar constitution of this small company which formed a kind of family, closely united by common interests, ambitions, and

affections. Until then a piece was often nothing more than a star actor planted well in the front of the stage, taking his time and prolonging his effects, and behind him a dozen or so nonentities mumbling mere odds and ends of dialogue and addressing themselves to the back of their more famous colleague. For the first time there was now at the "Prince of Wales's," an *ensemble* moulded by assiduous rehearsals and perfected by the practice of every night.

In *Ours*, John Hare, who played the rôle of Prince Perofsky, had only to utter a dozen sentences—hackneyed and affected compliments—yet he made out of it a really striking portrait of a Slavonic Grand Seigneur, with a smouldering passion in his heart veiled under the most perfect manners. Besides his impressiveness there was something enigmatic about him that set one speculating as to the part he was to play in the plot,—an enigma to which there was to be no solution.

At length, in *Caste*, Robertson gave him a real rôle, that of Sam Gerridge. I imagine, indeed, that author and actor contributed equally to the creation of this character. The same might be said, perhaps, of that of Captain Hawtree, created by Bancroft in the same play. Seldom, surely, has the use of this big word "created" (so often applied in the papers to the most insignificant performances) been warranted so fully as in these cases.

Before Sothern's time the man of the world used

to be represented on the English stage as an absurd figure treading on tiptoe while in ladies' society and ogling them *à bout portant*.

The type had been changed as regards costume, but not as regards language, from that of the Macaroni of 1770. The dandy of 1840 does not seem to have found his way on to the stage until 1865.

It was a complete change from this type to the character presented by Bancroft as Captain Hawtree, humorous but not ridiculous; not in the least essential to the play, yet attracting a large share of interest and sympathy. An elegantly languid air, which yet spoke of weakness neither of muscles nor of character; a blind acceptance of the social code, which was not incompatible with generous feelings and a sense of humour; a mixture of soldier-like cordiality and worldly cynicism, which amounted to an *état d'âme* if not to a philosophy: these were some of the features that went to make up the character.

When circumstances—quite simple and natural—lead to Hawtree's taking tea in humble East End lodgings, between a little dancing-girl and an old plumber, nearly all the fun of the scene comes from his mute expression of continual astonishment. Hawtree presents a curious combination of awkwardness and goodwill in the scene in which he brings the plates to Polly Eccles in the pantry to be washed. At bottom it is the attitude of the English gentleman towards the social question,—somewhat scornful, somewhat

amused, but ready to turn up his sleeves and put a shoulder to the wheel at need.

As for Marie Wilton, with what wonderful insight Robertson had made out the real genius of this little woman, whose talents were so real, if all her ambitions were not attainable! She looked back with horror at her successes at the Strand; she wanted never again to play a *gamin's* part (as we should call it) or to appear in burlesque. Robertson wrote her a succession of *gamin's* parts and burlesque scenes. But the *gamin* was petticoated and the burlesque scenes set in a comedy. I am not referring to *Society*, which was not written for the "Prince of Wales's." But what is it she has to do in the three other pieces? In *School* she climbs a wall. In *Ours* she takes part in a game of bowls, mimics the affectations of the swells of '65, plays at being a soldier, bastes a leg of mutton from a watering pot, and as a climax makes a roley-poley pudding, adapting military implements to culinary uses for the purpose. In *Caste* her operations are still more varied—she sings, dances, boxes people's ears, plays the piano, pretends to blow a trumpet, puts on a forage cap, and imitates a squadron of cavalry. If this is not burlesque, what is it?

Some months ago I saw her in a revival of *Money*, in which she plays the rôle of a woman of the world, and in one scene of which—a scene which owed much more to her than to Bulwer—she shows the steps of a dance. At this moment I seemed to see the legs of Pippo moving under

the skirts of Lady Franklin,—those legs which five and thirty years before had made so lively an impression on the brain of Charles Dickens.

Whether he was conscious of it or not, Robertson made her play Pippo all her life. These fantastic rôles, sketched on to the margin of domestic dramas, were to have a remarkable and twofold success; they were largely responsible for the good fortune of Robertson's comedies, and in the reading of these they constitute, as it were, appetising *hors d'œuvres*. If I say to the admirers of *Caste* that Polly Eccles is an excrescence spoiling the artistic merit of the piece, they reply at once that, on the contrary, she is its life and soul; and from the point of view of stage effect, they are quite right.

The Bancrofts—they married shortly after the opening of the theatre—were the complements of each other. She was all fun and fancy, harum-scarum, irresponsible, indescribable. He was chiefly notable for thought, taste, careful observation, and truthful representation of real life. One of his first acts, as soon as there was some money in the exchequer of the “Prince of Wales's,” was to introduce a certain amount of intelligent realism into the scenery. He felt the need of doors with locks instead of the wretched folding-sashes, which shook before the draughts from the wings. In *Caste* he gave ceilings to the rooms. The last Act of *Ours* takes place in Crimean barracks during the winter of 1855; every time the door was opened a gust of snow came into the room

with a whirl and whistle, which produced so strong an illusion that the audience shivered. In the gardens, real flowers were introduced, and living birds. Charles Mathews was thought very enterprising because he had ventured to have some chairs placed in a drawing-room upon the stage. Bancroft went so far as to assign a different character to different suites of furniture. Thus in a revival of the *School for Scandal*, Joseph Surface's furniture was different from that of Sir Peter Teazle; his furniture, hypocritical as himself, seemed to make a pretence of being plain and simple, lied for him and bore out his lies. As for the actresses, instead of being made guys of by the theatrical costumiers, they had real dresses made for them by real dressmakers.

Robertson approved of these innovations, but he was never more than half a realist, and this from several causes. Like all Englishmen, he delighted in the warfare of words; he shared with them all, big and little, ancient and modern, that liking for brilliancy which is perhaps evolved from the liking of savages for brilliants. Once he began concocting repartees he forgot all else and gave his pen its head. He made his characters play a game of verbal battledore and shuttlecock. He dragged in by the nape of the neck, as it were, tirades whose proper place had been in a leading article. When he went too far, however, in these directions, he was often the first to make fun of the result. "What has that got to do with what we are talking about?" asks

a character in *Ours*. "It has nothing to do with it, that's why I said it." And in the same piece another character remarks of something that has happened, "If an author put that into a play, everyone would say that it was impossible and untrue to life."

Thus it was he would forestall gaily, with a sort of impudent frankness, the objections of the critics. The public enjoys this kind of thing. What it enjoys most of all, in England at any-rate, is the *grain de folie*, the lurking, unlooked-for quaintness, which characterises some of their humorists, Dickens, for instance, and Ben Jonson. It is this quality which is responsible for their creation of strange types whose ideas and conversations are all topsy-turvy.

It was in *School* that Robertson poured it out most plentifully. It was the most frivolous of his plays, and in this perhaps may be found the explanation of its success. The heroines are boarding-school girls; they are just at the age and in the situation in which no absurdity would seem too great or out of place. By a convention which the spectator agrees to willingly, they are girls in Act I. and women three weeks later in Act III. In these three weeks they have learned the meaning of life.

"What is love?" asks one of the youngest in the first scene. "Why, everyone knows what love is," Naomi tells her. "Well, what is it then?" asks another, and the first speaker insists that no one seems to know.

Then comes the time for them to pass from vague theory to real experience. It is the evening, in the orchard. There are two flirtation scenes, one following the other, full of childishness, but full of *naïveté*, freshness, and charm. There is question of the distance from the earth to the moon, of the play of light and shade, of a little milk-jug which it takes two to carry, of the Crimean War, and of Othello. Of love there is no word, but it underlies their every feeling, hides behind every word, peeps out through every glance, mingles with the very air they breathe.

Naomi: . . . “I like to hear you talk.”

Jack (bows): “The fibs or the truth?”

Naomi: “Both. Have you ever been married?”

Jack: “Never.”

Naomi: “What are you?”

Jack: “Nothing. It’s the occupation I am most fitted for.”

Naomi: “Oh, you must be something?”

Jack: “No.”

Naomi: “What were you before you were what you are now?”

Jack: “A little boy.” . . .

Naomi: “Mr. Farintosh was saying at table that you had been in the army. Were you a horse-soldier or a foot-soldier?”

Jack: “A foot-soldier,—a very foot-soldier.”

Naomi: “And that you were in the Crimea?”

Jack: “Ya-as, I was there.”

Naomi: “At the battle of Inkermann?”

Jack: "Ya-as."

Naomi: "Then why didn't you mention it?"

Jack: "Not worth while, there were so many other fellows there."

Naomi: "Did you fight?"

Jack: "Ya-as, I fought."

Naomi: "Weren't you frightened?"

Jack: "Immensely."

Naomi: "Then why did you stay?"

Jack: "Because I had'nt the pluck to run away."

Naomi: "Did they pay you much for fighting?"

Jack: "No, but then I didn't do much fighting, so that I was even with them in that respect!"

Naomi: . . . "Are you fond of reading?"

Jack: "Ya-as. Middling."

Naomi: "Did you ever read Othello?"

Jack: "Ya-as. But I don't think it nice reading for young ladies."

Naomi: "Othello told Desdemona of the dangers he had passed and the battles he had won."

Jack: "Ya-as. Othello was a nigger, and did'nt mind bragging." . . .

It would be but an ill service to Robertson to give an outline of his plays. A mere outline would give the impression that they were childish and absurd, and they were neither the one nor the other. He never invented a striking situation, so far as I am aware. He never settled (or even raised) a moral or social problem in any of his

productions. He gave all his attention to the characters and the dialogue. A scribbled synopsis found amongst his papers reveals his method of character-drawing. He stuck down three words, one after another—a name, a profession, a ruling passion, such as love, ambition, cupidity, pride. With these words he thought he had summed up the ordinary conventional man, as nature had formed him, and society had reformed or deformed him: a very elementary but very sane psychology, which he enriched, embellished, elaborated, with the flowers of his fancy and the fruits of his observation. I have given some specimens of the former. I may now give some specimens of the second, to justify the title of half-realist which I have given him.

He wanted nothing better than to be a realist and to reproduce what he had actually seen. He knew nothing of great ladies, as one may well understand. When he had to portray them he was obliged to copy from bad models. His Lady Ptarmigan is a regular *bourgeoise*; his Marquise de Saint Maur, who learns bits of Froissart by heart and gives lessons in history to her son, is either a myth or an anachronism. His Hawtree, on the other hand, is as real as can be; Robertson had met him probably in the clubs which he frequented. In *School* he introduced a foolish yet ferocious usher, who was, it seems, a reminiscence of his youthful expedition to Holland. His rancour had not become extinguished in the twenty years that had intervened, and he could not resist the somewhat brutal satisfaction of

inflicting a physical punishment in the last act upon his old enemy. He used to ask his small boy, whilst walking with him in Belsize Park, what he would answer to such and such a question? How would he set about enraging his master? And the boy would receive sixpence or a florin according to the nature of his reply.

Soldiers, theatrical folk, artistic and literary Bohemians, are painted as they live, slightly idealised. In *Caste* we have two specimens of the people—bad and good—in the persons of Eccles and Sam Gerridge. “Work, my boy,” says Eccles to his future son-in-law; “there’s nothing like work—when you’re young.” As for him,—well, it was some years since he worked (as a matter of fact he had lived on his daughters, and not touched a tool for twenty years), but he loved to see young folk at work. That did him good,—did them good too. He declaims against the upper classes; but when a marchioness passes his threshold, he bows down before her, and conducts her back to her carriage, only to return to his real self, insolent and venomous, the moment she has gone. When he makes his way to the public-house to drink, he gives a “business appointment” as his pretext—“a friend who is waiting for him round the corner.” Always posing and aiming at effect, he uses big words for the smallest matters, and can produce a tear in his eye at will. He has a few garbled bits of literature at his command, and makes use of mangled quotations from *King Lear*. And,

wretched actor though he be, he is able, with the aid of filial affection, to produce an illusion in the mind of one of his daughters. “Poor dad,” says Polly, “he is so good at heart—and *so* cute.”

No money in the house! He has been left at home by himself to mind the child of his eldest daughter, married to an officer who was well-born and rich, but who, it is supposed, has perished in the Indian Mutiny. The old drunkard rocks the cradle, angrily puffing his tobacco smoke in the baby’s face.

Eccles: . . . “Mind the baby, indeed! (*Smokes and puffs angrily short cloud.*) That fool of a ge’l to go and throw away her chances (*rises*) for the sake of being an Honourable-ess. (*Goes up centre.*) To think of her father not having the price of an early pint, or a quartern of cool refreshing gin! Rock the young Honourable! (*Kicks the cradle.*) Cuss him! Are we slaves, we working-men? (*Sings.*) ‘Britons never, never, never’— (*Snatches pipe from his mouth, throws it over the fireplace, takes chair front of table.*) However, I shan’t stand this much longer! I’ve writ the old cat!—the Marquizzy, I mean; I told her her daughter-in-law and her grandson were starving! That fool Esther is too proud to do it herself. I ’ate pride—it’s beastly. (*Rises.*) There’s no beastly pride about me! (*Goes up centre, clacks his tongue against the roof of mouth.*) I’m as dry as a limekiln! Of course, there’s nothing in the house fit for a Christian to drink!

(*Looks into the jug on dresser.*) Empty! (*Lifts teapot on mantel.*) Tea! (*Turns up his nose. Turns to table, looks into jug on it.*) Milk! (*Contempt.*) Milk for this aristocratic young pauper! Everybody in the 'ouse is saggrezified for him! To think of me, Member of the Committee of Banded Brothers, organised for the Regeneration of Human Kind by an Equal Diffusion of Labour and an Equal Division of Property!—to think of me, without the price of a pot of beer, while this aristocratic pauper wears round his neck—a coral of gold—real gold. Oh, Society! Oh, Governments! Oh, Class-degradation! Is *this* right? Shall this mindless wretch enjoy in his sleep a jewelled gaud while his poor old grandfather is *thirsty*? It shall not be! I will resent the outrage on the Rights of Man! In this holy crusade of class against class, of (*very meekly*) the weak and lowly against the (*loudly, pointing to cradle*) powerful and strong! I will strike one blow for freedom. (*Stoops over cradle.*) He's asleep! This coral will fetch ten "bob" around the corner! If the Marquizzy gives anythink, it can be easy got out again! (*Takes coral.*) Lie still, darling—lie still, darling! It's grandfather a-watching you! (*Sings.*) 'Who ran to catch me when I fell? who *kicked* the spot to make it well?—My grandfather!' (*Goes R.*) Lie still, my darling!—lie still, my darling!"

These comedies reveal the date of their composition in every line. Everybody cries out in

them against money, but as against a master. Love cuts but a poor figure in comparison, though for form's sake it may triumph for five minutes before the curtain falls. Sam Gerridge, the virtuous plumber, who acts as counterpoise to the old wretch Eccles, has concocted a philosophy for himself out of the notices which he has seen on public conveyances—"First Class," "Second Class," "Third Class," "Holders of Third-Class Tickets must not enter Second-Class Carriages." As for him, he proposes to establish himself, and, from being a workman, to become an employer. John Burns will tell you that this kind of democracy is a negation of true democracy; in 1868 the formula seemed wide and generous enough.

In such a manner was it that Robertson, who had wished that the world were a football which he could send into space with one kick, that the same Robertson, who, as he quitted those nocturnal symposia at Tom Hood's, would bring down his stick upon the pavement with a noise that made the silent streets resound, as he held forth indignantly against society,—grew in time and unconsciously, though in a manner easy to understand, to be the interpreter of the feelings and ideas of this very same society. The former assailant now defended the social rank which he had attained against both the enemies above and the enemies below. The new strata which came into being in 1832 were now half-way through their evolution. In 1850 they had been content with melodramas, vulgar farces, and Hippodramas.

In 1865 they asked already for wit, sentiment, satire, poetic feeling, all flavoured, it might be, with Cockneyism, but this demand was an indication of progress, and Robertson satisfied it by writing the middle-class comedy.

The change which took place just then in the life of the dramatist convinces me that I am right. He hastened to take leave of his irregular life, and to feel after *bourgeois* comforts. He worked out for himself a happiness which made him, like the poor vagabond in the fable, weep for very joy. The Eve of this new-opened Paradise was a fair German whom he had met at the house of the editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, whose niece she was. Robertson did not long enjoy the sweets of this happy land. His mental and physical powers seemed to die away together. Mrs. Bancroft, who accompanied him to the first night of *The Nightingale*, saw him, livid with rage, shake his fist at the hissing members of the audience, muttering, "I shall never forgive them for this!"

The doctors ordered him to Torquay, where, however, he grew worse. I have read a letter which he wrote thence to his young wife,—a pitiful letter, all in little jerky sentences, set in rhythm by the sick man's pants for breath. Pitiful, yet gay, for he could not give up being facetious. On his return to London he experienced a literary misfortune of which it was the lot of little Tommy, then thirteen or fourteen years old, to bring the news. Father and son looked upon

each other with tearful eyes, and grasped each other's hands. "If they had seen me thus," said the writer sadly, "they would have had pity." Robertson was wrong. The public should know nothing of these things. There are no extenuating circumstances for literary mistakes.

He died some days later. He was only forty-four. A friend who attended the funeral remarked, lying in the death chamber, its limbs dangling and disjointed, a doll whose injured stomach gave out sawdust through a wide opening. It was a doll with which he used to amuse his little girl to the very end. As for the puppets with which he had so long amused the world, they were to have a longer life. His comedies were destined to be continually revived, applauded, and imitated. Out of the six thousand performances given by the Bancrofts in a period of twenty years which formed one long success, three thousand belonged to Robertson. He alone furnished half their repertoire, and that the better half. From the depths of the out-of-the-way district which it had brought into fashion, the Prince of Wales's company sent colonies into the heart of the metropolis. It was by actors who had been brought out in it, as in a *conservatoire*, that the Vaudeville, the Globe, and the Court Theatres were founded. The inexhaustible success of *The Two Roses*—of which there will be question further on—placed the name of James Albery almost as high.

Byron, in his turn, took a leaf out of the book of his old comrade, and succeeded, in *Our Boys*,

in producing a comedy without (or almost without) puns. *Our Boys* resembles Robertson's comedies just as a cook resembles her mistress when she is decked out in her mistress's hat and gown, or as Cathos and Madelon resemble the Marquise de Rambouillet and Julie d'Angennes. Even in this unintentionally caricature-like form the Robertsonian comedy continued to please, and it looked as though *Our Boys* would never leave the bills.

The exacting, the fastidious, those who had begun to dream of a purer and more penetrating art, dubbed Robertsonian comedy "Cup and Saucer" comedy. The school accepted the nickname, and gloried in it. For the tea-table, fifteen or twenty years ago, was still the centre of the home, the symbol of the family, the core of English life, such as it had been formed by the combination of the spirit of Puritanism with that of middle-class Utilitarianism.

The name of the Bancrofts remained associated with the "Cup and Saucer" comedy as long as the movement lasted. As soon as they became sensible of their favourite author's decline in the eyes of the public they called Sardou to their assistance. By 1880 the Prince of Wales's had become too small for them and they emigrated to the Haymarket, which Mr. Bancroft had reconstructed as it is now, after a new plan, without the conventional proscenium, with the orchestra out of sight, the stage encased in a gilt frame like a picture, and no pit.

This last innovation is characteristic. The pit

from having composed the whole arena of the hall, had been moved back bit by bit, until at last it was confined to a few back benches behind the dress circle. To suppress it altogether was not so much an act of authority as of emancipation. It has been said that Mr. Bancroft thought too much of his gentility, and that he seemed anxious to reserve his theatre for the *élite*: *Satis est equitem mihi plaudere*. But even then? After all, it was only a case of an extremely able man keeping pace with the democratic generation to which he belonged, in his rise towards fortune and its accompanying enjoyments. He raised the price of stalls from six to seven shillings, and then to ten-and-sixpence. The public was evidently able to pay, for the stalls were always full.

It should be added that, under the management of the Bancrofts, the rise in salaries was out of all proportion to the rise in the price of seats. The weekly salary of one actor, continuing to play in the same rôle, went from £18 to £60, and that of another from £9 to £50. Mrs. Stirling had created the rôle of the Marchioness in *Caste* at the "Prince of Wales's," and received seven times as much for appearing in it at the Haymarket. Douglas Jerrold said to Charles Mathews: "I don't despair of seeing you yet with a good cotton umbrella under your arm, carrying your savings to the bank." Many years afterwards Mathews, presiding over the Theatrical Fund, recalled this remark, and added, "The first part of Jerrold's wish has been fulfilled. I have

bought an umbrella." Thanks to the Bancrofts and the managers who came after them, the bank has been in receipt of the savings of many actors who previously would have been content if only they might earn their daily bread.

Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft saw the time approaching when the monopoly they had secured of the works of Robertson would cease to exist; they felt at once that the vein was being exhausted, and that the new generation would have new needs. Able and far-sighted, they determined to retire at the zenith of their success, and if not in their youth, at least in their prime and in the full activity of their intellect. Neither of them was forty-five when in 1885 they gave their farewell performance at the Haymarket.

Amongst the innumerable tokens of esteem which conduced to the triumph of this withdrawal, I shall cite only one. It is a letter from Arthur W. Pinero, who had belonged as an actor to the Bancroft Company, and who has taken since then a foremost place amongst English dramatists. He wrote to his former manager:—

"It is my opinion, expressed here as it is elsewhere, that the present advanced condition of the English stage—throwing as it does a clear, natural light upon the manner and life of the people, where a few years ago there was nothing but moulding and tinsel—is due to the crusade begun by Mrs. Bancroft and yourself in your little Prince of Wales's Theatre. When the

history of the stage and its progress is adequately and faithfully written, Mrs. Bancroft's name and your own must be recorded with honour and gratitude."

I took it into my head not long ago to pay a visit to the little theatre in which Frédéric Lemaître appeared, in which Napoleon and Count d'Orsay rubbed shoulders with Dickens and Thackeray, in which there was difficulty once in finding a seat for Gladstone, and in which Beaconsfield received a memorable ovation. The Salvationists have succeeded to the comedians, and, whether or not it be that their trumpets have the virtue of those of Jericho, these historic walls are crumbling to ruin. The place is empty, cold, and desolate. It was on an evening of last winter that I stood pensively under the porch—the porch through which had flowed like a stream all the elegance and talent of a whole generation. The light of a gas jet shone mournfully on the notice, mouldy already, "To be let or sold"; and the rain trickled down on me from a gaping hole whence the electric light used once to glare upon pretty women issuing in all their finery from their carriages. My curiosity was not satisfied. In order to obtain admission inside, I gave myself out as a lecturer in search of a hall, but the ruse failed. I was told that I should have to pay £4500 or £6000, and was asked whether this trifling outlay would interfere with me. I did not pursue the negotiations, and the door remained closed.

CHAPTER V

Gilbert : compared with Robertson—His first Literary Efforts—
The *Bab Ballads*—*Sweethearts*—A Series of Experiments—
Gilbert's Psychology and Methods of Work—*Dan'l Druce,*
Engaged, The Palace of Truth, The Wicked World—
Pygmalion and Galatea—The Gilbert and Sullivan Operas.

WHEN Marie Wilton's company, during their first holiday, went on tour to Liverpool, they happened upon the autumn assizes. The young London barristers who followed the circuit made haste to fraternise with the theatrical folk, and a sort of little colony came into being in which everyone rejoiced and made merry. Grotesque trials were represented in which Marie Wilton, got up as the Lord Chief Justice in wig and gown, gave forth admirable verdicts ; she tells of these frolics in her Memoirs, adding pleasantly : "We were all young then, and the fun perhaps appeared greater than it would now, but it was a very happy time."

Among these young barristers there was one named Gilbert. He was soon to throw aside his gown in order to devote himself to the calling in which he was to achieve a reputation as great as Robertson's,—a reputation which still lives. The contrast between the two dramatists is

striking. Robertson is a craftsman, brought up in the theatre, amenable to outside influences ; he collaborates with his actors, with the public, —one may say, with his entire generation. The ideas of his time, good, bad and indifferent, exude from him at every pore. He becomes, therefore, unconsciously, a representative man and the leader of a school. Where Robertson is a natural product, a symptom, Gilbert is a freak, an accident. He might have “occurred” at any time in the century, or indeed in any century. One can neither trace his ancestry nor imagine his posterity. Born and bred a gentleman, he loved the theatrical world without being of it. Actors have accused him of being cold in his manner to them, high and mighty, even disdainful. So much for his personal character ;—in discussing a living writer, more than this would be improper. As to his bent of mind, its originality was evident from the first, but that originality was at all times somewhat shallow and liable to run dry ; and instead of widening it, he scooped it out.

He exploited his talent by a kind of mathematical system, to its utmost limit, to the point of absurdity, in fact, and even further. His literary career may be described as containing three periods : in the first he felt his way ; in the second he achieved brilliant and legitimate successes ; in the third he met with even more fruitful triumphs, but of a kind which arouse little sympathy in a critic, and of which, I think,

even he himself grew a bit tired. But he is so true an artist, and at the same time so typically English, that a French critic may well study him, even in his errors, without feeling that it is waste of time.

It was some verses which he contributed from week to week to *Fun* that first attracted attention to him. He reprinted them under the title, *Bab Ballads*, and as the public seemed to want them he followed these up with *More Bab Ballads*. Some of them were set to music and are still popular as songs, but these are not the ones which have the most flavour. It is difficult to describe this flavour; it consisted in a kind of naïve irony, expressed in a form that was sometimes extravagant, sometimes studiously careless,—a blend of the deliberately prosaic with amazing fantasy. Some of these ballads finished up with a surprise, the others did not finish up at all,—which was a surprise too.

Gilbert offered to his friends at the Prince of Wales's a pleasant little comedy entitled *Sweethearts*. A young man is about to start for India, where he is to make a career for himself, but he is in love with a young girl who lives near his country home. She has but to say a word and he will not go, or will not go alone. She does not say this word. What prevents her? Is it timidity, bashfulness, pride, or that strange spirit of contradiction or of coquetry which sometimes keeps the tongue from obeying the dictates of the heart? However that may be, she lets

him go. Thirty years ensue. The lover returns, grey haired now,—a lover, indeed, no longer.

Distance in time, as in space, makes things look small. His “grande passion” seems to him now a boyish fancy. He merely wishes to see the spot again ; that is all. She, too, is there, seated under the shade of the tree which they planted together, retaining still the flower which he had given her, faithful to the memory of the love she had seemed to scorn. The old boy’s scepticism gives way to tenderness. They marry. But will they ever find the thirty years that they have lost ?

Here is one of those pleasingly fanciful ideas that a man like Octave Feuillet may work out delightfully. Sadness and gladness should alternate in it like mist and sunshine on an autumn day. Now, Gilbert is a cynic, though a refined cynic, and he could deal only with half of his subject. In his little comedy, one or other of its two characters is always carping at love. In the first act it is the woman, in the second the man. Gilbert speaks, and very cleverly, through the mouth of this railer, but, alas ! there seems nothing to be said on the other side. From the moment of this first attempt of his, the young author had to face the fact that he had a great disqualification for the writing of dramas ; he could neither depict love nor reproduce its language. Is it out of a kind of revenge that he has continued to rail at love ever since ?

Nevertheless, he made some further efforts during the years which followed. He wrote

Broken Hearts, a fantastic drama in verse, and made it clear even to himself that he was unequal to such high flights. He aimed at freeing Goethe's Margaret from all that philosophy which surrounds and obscures her, and he discovered that the idyll thus disencumbered, and naturally told, became flat and commonplace. He was then inspired by history, and the idea entered his head—probably after some reading that had moved him and awakened in him some dormant atavistic instinct—that his misanthropy would have a new force in the mouth of a puritanical peasant of the seventeenth century. But how difficult it is for a university man, a Garrick Club man, to feel and speak like such a character! As far as mere language is concerned, the author was fairly successful; *Dan'l Druce* is a pleasing mosaic of archaic phrases, an ingenious transcription of the speech of those days. (But was the public which applauded *School* and *Society* sufficiently advanced in its artistic education to enjoy these things?) Can one say the same, however, of the ideas? Had one submitted, for instance, to a contemporary of John Fox or of Bunyan the moral question on which Mr. Gilbert's drama turns, would he really have solved it after the fashion of *Dan'l Druce*? Surely not.

It is an interesting problem, though, of course, not new. To which of the two does the child belong—to him who begat but abandoned it, or to him who took pity on it and brought it up? It is the modern conscience that decides in favour

of the second ; the Puritan conscience of former days would have feared to interfere with that natural order of things in which it saw the guiding hand of God. As all things in this world and the next were pre-ordained, the father must remain the father in spite of everything, just as the chosen remained chosen, and the evil evil ; the heart might bleed, but Divine Providence must have its way. This, it seems to me, had been the Puritan solution. But while we are reflecting upon these things, this problem, by a characteristic Gilbertian stroke, is turned upside down through a series of utterly incredible complications, the real father becomes the adoptive, and the adoptive father the real. Thenceforth we tumble from psychology into melodrama, and there remains no problem to solve.

A love-scene was required in the play, as there were a young man and a girl amongst its characters. Their conversation—apart from certain pretty archaic touches which continue to delight me—is a sort of subtle intellectual game. Each seizes upon some one word in the last phrase of the other, works it up into a new phrase and darts it back. Thus the dialogue is bandied about to and fro, the great thing being to keep it up. Sometimes, however, it falls to the ground. “I don’t know what to say,” Dorothy’s answer to her lover’s proposal, seems to suggest that the author himself is in a difficulty. This Dorothy is a thoroughly ingenuous young person, naïvely outspoken to the point of silliness.

She is not sure of being in love, and discusses the subject like a question of conscience with him whose interest in it is most at stake. "These are my feelings," she tells him. "Is this love or is it not?" This self-analysing *ingénue* is the only woman's character in the whole of Gilbert's dramatic work.

Before writing *Engaged*, some such thoughts as these must have passed through his mind. "I shall turn out the human soul like a bag and show its lining instead of its cover. It will be very ugly, but all the more amusing. What does a man want when he puts aside all hypocrisy and all regard for social conventions, and gives the rein to his appetites and instincts?—To eat, to drink, to sleep, to be at his ease; to see all those die off from whom legacies are to be expected; to win, honourably or otherwise, every pretty woman who comes across his path. And what does a woman want?—To shine in society, to have fine dresses, to be admired, to marry a man who may give her a good position in the world. What is the meeting-point of the feelings of both man and woman?—The greed for money wherewith to buy the rest.

"My *dramatis personæ* shall be neither good nor bad, they shall be naïvely and absolutely selfish,—their selfishness shown clearly, but in the thousand shades which civilisation has imparted to characters; it shall be expressed not bluntly but in the thousand shades which well-bred people bring into the utterance of fine sentiments

and correct commonplaces. They shall lack only the moral sense; of this organ I shall deprive them as neatly and gently as possible. *Fiancé* and *fiancée*, father and daughter, friend and friend, shall become enemies the moment their interests clash; the moment their interests agree they shall clasp hands and kiss again as before. Three couples will perform these evolutions and manœuvres before the audience, and the young girls will change their lovers as complacently as they would their partners in a quadrille. In a few minutes Cheviot Hill will propose to three different women; within the same space of time Simpson will throw his daughter at the head of Cheviot Hill, and drive his intending son-in-law to suicide. Belvonny will expend all his energies in the first half of a scene in denying a certain fact, and during the second half of it will make no less desperate efforts to establish this fact. Thus will the changeableness of men be demonstrated at the same time as their egoism. These puppets are monsters and these monsters puppets: my audience will not need to be told that ‘*Il faut se hâter d'en rire de peur d'être obligé d'en pleurer.*’ ”

So cruel a farce had never been seen. The public was accustomed in farces to two or three comic characters, to satire at the expense of two or three ridiculous types. Here was a caricature of all mankind. The spectators laughed, but the jest was too bitter for their

palate. It was at once too unreal and too true. Such cynical outspokenness might mark the conversation of the inhabitants of some dream-land. But it was incongruous where people travelled by railway and read the daily paper. Gilbert had but to transfer his puppets to the enchanted region where he located his *Palace of Truth* for the big children who composed the public to accept them with glee.

The *Palace of Truth* is a pleasant piece based on the same notions of psychology as *Engaged*, but the satire is less bitter and less obvious. Here there is no mistake possible. Before seeing the characters as they really are, we have seen them playing every rôle in the human comedy. In the second act the faithful husband flirts indiscriminately to every side of him; the devoted girl-friend is a machiavelian coquette; the ardent lover, so generous of madrigals and sighs, is a vain and selfish coxcomb; the *ingénue*, chaste and correct almost to the point of coldness, is beyond herself with love; the honey-lipped courtier becomes candid and insolent to all the world; finally, the most amusing metamorphosis of all, the professional boor, who has achieved notoriety by his merciless criticisms, is the only person sincerely content with his life. Alceste has changed skins with Philinthe.

In this world of fantasy, Gilbert was at last thoroughly at home. He experimented without restraint, like those physiologists who practise upon animals, depriving this one of viscera, that

one of a cerebral lobe, a third of some nerve essential to motion. His *Creatures of Impulse* do everything that comes into their heads, obeying every dictate of their instincts. In the case of the inhabitants of the *Palace of Truth*, their language is sincere enough, it is their manner that is hypocritical. The denizens of fairyland in *The Wicked World* are unacquainted with love; they form a kind of puritanical society up in the clouds. Once they are made to know the sentiment which they have lacked, every evil springs from the Pandora's box. Selenè passes through every stage of the malady. Joy, ecstasy, absolute security, — the celestial period; then vague disquietude, anxiety, with fierce jealousy on their heels; then anger, quarrels, threats of vengeance, finally, profound humiliation. The mocker had it all his own way, hitting to right and to left. On the one side, at the colourlessness, the shabbiness, the squalid monotony of virtue; on the other, at the enervating and degrading effects of vice.

But Gilbert never soared so high either in his philosophy or in his art as in *Pygmalion and Galatea*. This was one of the great successes of the Haymarket in 1871 and 1872. Galatea was impersonated by Madge Robertson, the young sister of the dramatist, then in the flower of her twenty-second year; and Kendal, whose wife she was soon to be, was Pygmalion. Miss Robertson's grace of person, her pure and noble diction, were aids to success, though it was not

to them that success was due. Even had the piece fallen quite flat, however, I should still give it a place above all the other productions of the author.

I know, of course, what captious critics have had to say on the subject. Nothing is easier, indeed, than to pull to pieces the figure of Galatea ; to show how far it is from plausibility ; how inconsistent Gilbert was in his composition of it ; to show how, almost in the same breath, she asks the most childish, almost imbecile, questions, and indulges in an analysis of her emotions as subtle as Joubert's or Amiel's ; how this absolutely ignorant creature, who asks whether the room in which she comes to life is the world, has yet the faculty of explaining the stages of consciousness through which she has passed on her way to full existence ; how she can distinguish between an original and a copy, and be jealous at another's having sat as a model for her features, although she does not know the difference between a man and a woman.

Then, again, there is her characterisation of a soldier, when she has the meaning of the word explained to her, as a "hired assassin." Her comprehension of these two words "assassin" and "hired" presuppose some rudimentary knowledge of the principal social institutions which affect the preservation of life, as well as of penalties, and salaries, and of the circulation of money and of the economic laws which it

obeys. The soldier, she is told, attacks only the strong. That may be so; still war, she insists, is cruel. As for hunting, it is cowardly. All these reflections and comparisons, all this reasoning in a brain of marble which could not think, which did not exist, a few hours before!

These examples might be multiplied, but to no end. All such criticisms are vain, because they assume our acceptance of a general thesis more improbable than all the minor ones which it involves. No statue ever did come to life, but if one were to, it would find itself in the position of a newborn child. Before learning to moralise, it would first have to learn how to walk and how to talk; its first movement would be a tumble, its first utterance inarticulate: whoever submits such myths to this kind of critical examination is to be sincerely pitied, for whether he realise it or no he thus deprives himself of whatever of poetry or of suggestiveness, of charm, or of profundity, they may contain.

For Gilbert the fable of Galatea, of the statue come to life, was something more than it had ever been either for artist or man of thought: it offered a form to that dream by which he was haunted, a frame for that favourite picture he had so often sketched out already—the woman whose heart is a *tabula rasa*, whose mind is an instrument that has never been used, but is perfected and ready for use, who for the expression of her unsophisticated feelings has all the resources of intelligence and

language at her command. What *we* learn during the toilsome schooling of twenty or thirty years *she* apprehends at a glance, and it would seem that she is the better able to judge of life in that she sees it reflected, as it were, in a single picture suddenly unveiled.

Mr. Gilbert's Pygmalion is married to a woman whom he loves, and who sits to him as a model. He is not in love with the statue at the outset. He is jealous, however,—and in this conception the author is more Greek than the Greeks themselves,—of the gods, in that they alone have the power of giving life. *He* is capable only of producing this inanimate figure. As for death, any common murderer can achieve that better than he. It is not Venus who gives life to Galatea to satisfy mere lust ; it is Diana, whose priestess Cynisca he had taken from her, and who avenges herself by this cruel gift, whilst humbling at the same time the pride of the sons of Prometheus. Thus it comes that Pygmalion's feeling upon first noting the aspect of the living statue is not rapture but wonder, a sort of religious awe, the exaltation of a lofty and intellectual paternity. It is the gradual passage from this feeling to that of love which constitutes the life and, I may add, the beauty of this scene. You can guess what is the first question of Galatea, "Who am I?"—"A woman." "And you, are you also a woman?"—"No, I am a man." "What, then, is a man?" Upon this the pit would burst out in a roar of laughter which must have hurt the ears of the author.

How few of those who laughed were qualified to appreciate Pygmalion's reply—

“A being strongly framed,
To wait on woman, and protect her from
All ills that strength and courage can avert ;
To work and toil for her, that she may rest ;
To weep and mourn for her, that she may
 laugh ;
To fight and die for her, that she may live ! ”

Galatea learns the right which another woman possesses to Pygmalion, the thousand shackles by which men are content to limit their slender liberty and to diminish their fugitive enjoyments. The evening comes, and with it sleep. She thinks she is turning again to stone, then she dreams, and then she sees the light once more. But is life the dream or is the dream life ? She asks Myrine, Pygmalion's sister, for an explanation of all these things. Myrine replies—

Myrine : “Once every day this death occurs
 to us,

Till thou and I and all who dwell on earth
Shall sleep to wake no more ! ”

Galatea : (*Horried, takes Myrine's hand*)

“To wake no more ? ”

Pygmalion : “That time must come, may
 be, not yet awhile,

Still it must come, and we shall all return
To the cold earth from which we quarried thee.”

Galatea: "See how the promises of new-born life

Fade from the bright life-picture one by one !

Love for Pygmalion—a blighting sin,

His love a shame that he must hide away.

Sleep, stone-like, senseless sleep, our natural state,

And life a passing vision born thereof,

From which we wake to native senselessness !

How the bright promises fade one by one !"

At this point the idea reaches its full expression. The scenes written for old Buckstone, as an Athenian dilettante who judges statues by their weight ; his dialogue with *Galatea*, in which the piece returns to the old groove of fun and folly and sinks almost to the level of burlesque, and finally, the domestic drama in which *Pygmalion* and *Cynisca* are concerned, and then the renunciation of self which moves *Galatea* to become once again the lifeless statue, that she may thus bring back peace and happiness to those upon whom she had entailed trouble and disunion : all this adds but little to the value of the piece, though it cannot be said to spoil it. It remains one of the most delicate, graceful, and ingenious of modern English plays.

Gilbert had felt the need more than once of providing some sort of musical accompaniment for his paradoxical fantasies, for is not music the natural background to the land of dreams ? This accompaniment seemed to soften the outlines of

his thought and to temper the bitterness of his satire. The writer had experimented first with the music of his own verses, but this was not a success. Why then should he not secure the aid of real music by a musician? He did so in *Trial by Jury*, a very amusing one-act piece, suggested in part by his joyous reminiscences of Liverpool. It was a little piece, but it had a big success. Then came the long series of comic operas which have rendered the Gilbert and Sullivan combination as popular in England as that of Meilhac and Halévy with Offenbach was with us during the last ten years of the Empire. The English owe a debt of gratitude to their compatriots for having dethroned burlesque and operetta, two imports from France which competed with the national manufacture. So far so well, but I doubt whether the native comic opera will survive its originators. Already they are out of fashion.

For my part, I never yawned so much as I did at *Princess Ida*, unless it was at *Patience*. The first is a parody of the unsuccessful work of Tennyson, which bears the similar title *The Princess*, and is a satire upon the higher education of women; the second is a parody of the aesthetic movement. In *Iolanthe* I saw a Lord Chancellor who has been married to a fairy come at midnight to a spot in Westminster, with his colleagues of the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords, all dressed in their scarlet and ermine, and to sing (and dance) a judicial sentence (expressed in the correct legal phraseology), whilst the shining

face of Big Ben lit up the background and a grenadier on guard paced up and down before Whitehall.

In *The Pirates of Penzance*, and in *Pinafore*, mankind seems to be walking on its head. Everything happens contrariwise. The fun consists in making everyone say and do exactly the opposite of what might be expected from them, considering their character and profession. Here, briefly, is the plot of the *Pirates*. Frederic's nurse was charged by his parents to make him an apprentice to a pilot, but, being deaf, she had misunderstood and had handed him over to a pirate. The young man fulfilled his contract of apprenticeship, which provided for a certain number of years. This duty accomplished, it remains for him only to accomplish his duty as a citizen of proceeding to the extermination of his ex-companions. He has set himself ardently to this when the pirate chief points out to him that by the terms of his indenture he is not to be free until his birthday shall have come round a certain specified number of times. Now Frederic was born on the 29th of February in leap year! He has therefore many long years still to serve with the pirates. An outlaw's devotion to strict legality—this may be said to be the idea, which is worked out in the production with a methodical determination to overlook no single aspect of the question, the characters being dealt with like so many briefs. Would you have supposed that there would be material enough in this to furnish forth three hours'

entertainment? But the author was justified by the result.

Gilbert never quite succeeded in shaking off the dust of Chancery Lane and Lincoln's Inn. In many respects he may be said to have remained a lawyer all his life: by his professional scepticism, by the variety of his dialectical resources, by his proneness to subtle distinctions and interpretations, by his cleverness in setting up appearances against realities, and words against ideas, but above all, by his curious faculty for losing good cases and winning bad ones.

CHAPTER VI

Shakespeare again—From Macready to Irving ; Phelps, Fechter, Ryder, Adelaide Neilson—Irving's *Début*—His Career in the Provinces, and Visit to Paris—The Rôle of Digby Grant—The Rôle of Matthias—The Production of *Hamlet*—Successive Triumphs—Irving as Stage Manager—As an Editor of Shakespeare—His Defects as an Actor—Too great for some of his Parts—As a Writer and Lecturer ; his Theory of Art—Sir Henry Irving, Head of his Profession.

WHAT became of the "legitimate" drama the while Robertson busied himself with his attempts to bring comedy into the domain of reality, and Gilbert worked away at the exploiting of his fancy ? In a preceding chapter I have shown to what a depth of degradation it had fallen towards 1850. The old privileged theatres which had possessed the monopoly of it had abandoned it, and when it became public property the new theatres scorned to take it up. The two little Batemans, aged six and eight, piqued in *Richard III.* the curiosity of an unsophisticated, uneducated public, which was the readier to enjoy these childish exhibitions in that it was itself childish in its literary tastes. These little girls were symbols of a "Shakespeare Made Easy." An actor named Brooke made things still worse ;

with him it was a case of Shakespeare made ridiculous. He was laughed at up till the day which brought the news of his "Hero"-like end on a ship which was taking him to America, and which was wrecked; the poor tragedian had come upon real tragedy for the first time, in the hour of his death. From 1850 to 1860 the permanent home of Shakespeare was the theatre of Sadler's Wells at Islington. Imagine Corneille exiled to the *Bouffes du Nord*, or, further still, to the *Théâtre de Belleville*!

Phelps, whose undertaking it was, was not a great actor, but he was a good actor. He had, besides, the sacred fire, the key to certain rôles which up till then had been left to inferior performers, but which suited his personality, as he had the discrimination to perceive. They say his *Bottom* was a masterpiece of innocuous fatuity and conscientious blundering,—that crazy preoccupation of a workman, one sometimes encounters, with matters beyond the scope of his intelligence. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the fantastic parts were represented behind a curtain of gauze, which threw between the spectator and the scene a faint mist producing the illusion of the vagueness and indistinctness of a dream.¹ Kean and Macready had "popularised" Shakespeare, as had Garrick and Kemble before them, to the best of their ability; they tried to extract from all his plays every bit of the melodrama therein contained. Phelps, as it seems to me, brought out another

¹ Henry Morley, *Journal of a Playgoer*.

and nobler distinctive quality—that of *poèmes en action*. This does no small credit to the intelligence of a Shakespearian actor.

The Frenchman, Fechter, came next. The same Fechter who, with Madame Roche in *La Dame aux Camélias*, set our mothers weeping, brought back Shakespeare in triumph to the Princess's and to the Lyceum. In *Macbeth*, he was only middling; but while they say his *Othello* was the worst imaginable, his *Hamlet*, according to the same critics, could not be surpassed. He brought to light, indeed, an aspect of this great rôle which had been ignored. On the evening of his last performance of it, Macready, taking from him Hamlet's velvet coat, addressed to him, in tones of some emotion, Horatio's words—"Adieu, dear Prince!" and added, "It seems to me that I understand now for the first time all that there is of tenderness, humanity, and poetry in the character." Fechter found out traits which had escaped his predecessors. He imparted grace and elegance to the tranquil and pleasing parts of the action—a refined intellectual elegance proper to a prince who had passed through the University of Wittemberg. The advice of Hamlet to the players—the actor's Ten Commandments—he rendered with much art and spirit.

After Fechter there came a new, but only a partial eclipse. Beginners became old stagers and appeared in principal rôles. Between 1870 and 1875 I saw Ryder, whose voice varied in tone from that of an organ to that of a hunting-

horn, on several occasions, notably in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, with Miss Wallis, who had not the beauty, and could not suggest the charm, one ascribes to a woman for whom an empire were well lost. I recall, too, the countenance, with its delicately tragic aspect, of Adelaide Neilson, who shook with passion from top to toe, and shrieked and writhed, and yet kept her good looks. She met with a sudden death at Pré-Catelan,—it was a glass of milk that killed her within two hours; and in London they say that the proprietor of the hotel in which she was stopping was inhuman enough to threaten to thrust her out in her agony upon the streets.

He who was to bring back Shakespeare, and to make of him the most flourishing and most warmly applauded of dramatic writers, had already been long upon the stage,—he was already an actor of repute even; but the Shakespearian revival to which I allude dates from October 31, 1874. It was then that Henry Irving played Hamlet for the first time at the Lyceum.

There was an institution in the City, at one time frequented by amateurs of the drama, which was known as the City Elocution Class. A certain Mr. Henry Thomas conducted it according to the principle of mutual instruction associated with the name of Pestalozzi. As soon as each student had recited his piece, his colleagues had their say upon his delivery of it, pointing out any faults they discovered in his manner of giving it out, in his pronunciation, accent, or emphasis;

the master summed up these criticisms and pronounced his own judgment upon the subject. From time to time they gave public performances.

It was at one of these that there appeared one evening—in 1853—a strange-looking and attractive youth. His eyes, intelligent and full of fire, lit up a face whose features were delicate as a woman's. He wore a jacket of the old-fashioned cut and a great white collar. His long raven locks covered his neck and reached even to his shoulders.

He was then fourteen years old, and was employed in the office of an East India merchant. His early childhood had been spent in an out-of-the-way corner of Somerset, amongst sailors and miners. The library of the house in which he lived consisted of only three books, which he devoured—the Bible, *Don Quixote*, and a collection of old ballads. From these Western expanses, where the imaginative soul of the Celt has left something of its reveries, he had been transported when eleven to a mean little house in London, in one of those central districts which swarm and overflow like very ant-hills of humanity.

Two years of school-life ensued ; then his commercial apprenticeship, the stereotyped office-life. How was it that under these conditions Henry Irving's vocation for the theatre came out? He will tell us the story some day, perhaps, and tell it admirably. This, at least, is known, that his vocation, once it had declared itself, was distinct,

absolute, not to be shaken. We have before us one of those rare careers which are so perfectly ordered towards the accomplishment of some end by a resolute and inflexible will, that there is to be found in them no single wasted minute or ill-directed endeavour.

Young Irving frequented Phelps' theatre, Sadler's Wells; an old actor who belonged to it, David Hoskyns, gave him lessons, and on going off to Australia left him a letter of recommendation with the address blank. Phelps would have given him an engagement, but the young aspirant deemed himself too unworthy, and was anxious to commence his novitiate in the provinces. Doubtless he had an inkling already of the truth he expressed pithily at a later period: "The learning how to do a thing is the doing of it," — one of the most thoroughly English aphorisms ever given out in England. Thus it was that the bills of the Lyceum at Manchester, on September 26, 1856, contained the name of Henry Irving, who was to play the rôle of the Duke of Orleans in Lord Lytton's *Richelieu*. Thence he proceeded to Edinburgh, and in the next three years he played a hundred and twenty-eight parts. On September 24, 1859, he made his *début* in London at the Princess's, in an adaptation of the *Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre*. His part was limited to six lines. What was he to do? Repeat those lines evening after evening till he got addled? He preferred to break off his engagement. But before return-

ing to the provinces he gave two lectures at Crosby Hall, which drew from the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Standard* the prediction that he would have a fine career. Then came seven years of study and of growing success in Glasgow, Manchester, and Liverpool theatres. And then, the creation of a rôle in one of Boucicault's dramas having brought him into greater prominence, he at last set his foot firmly on the stage of the St. James's, whence he passed first to the Queen's, later to the Vaudeville, and finally to the Lyceum.

More than one Parisian must remember the posters with which the actor Sothern covered all our walls during the Exhibition of 1867, that haunting vision of Lord Dundreary with his long frock-coat, his hat slightly tilted over his forehead, and his glass fixed in his eye. In the second, perhaps it would be more correct to say the third, rank of this company which visited us, hid Henry Irving.

There are often two distinct phases of success. The first is that during which the conquest of one's professional brethren is achieved. Now, one's professional brethren maintain silence, sometimes with singular unanimity, upon the talents they have discovered, and thus retard that second period during which the greater and ultimate public success is at length attained. Irving was still in the first phase when he played Digby Grand in James Albery's *Two Roses*. Digby Grand is an impecunious gentleman who

accepts alms with an air of conferring favours,—a singular blend of pride and baseness, brazen-faced, insolent, a liar and a blackguard. The opening scene of the piece, in which he induces a landlady who has been pressing him for rent to offer him a loan of twenty pounds, is so brilliantly carried through, that it compels one to compare it with the scene of Don Juan and M. Dimanche. But how far is all the rest of it from fulfilling the promise of this beginning! From this out we have nothing but a tumult of words, a confusion of *jeux de scenes*, interrupted here and there by silly *preciosités* which are intended to serve as aphorisms. However, the vogue of the piece was inexhaustible, and such was the taste of the public, that two or three other actors attracted their attention more than Irving. On the occasion of the two hundred and ninety-first performance of *The Two Roses*, he recited "The Dream of Eugene Aram," and his delivery of it was a revelation. In it, indeed, the scope of the actor's art was immensely widened—what he actually expressed in his recital was nothing to what he was able to suggest. With the whole province of life for his subject, what was most impressive was the glimpse beyond, into the region of the unseen and the unknown.

Irving was able not only to impart more meaning to his words than they expressed in themselves, but he was addicted even to making them subservient to his own ideas, and of making the public accept his conception in the

face of a text which was in flat contradiction with it.

At this critical moment of his career a happy chance brought to him the very piece of all others calculated to bring out his gifts—a piece which should enable him to depict the wonderful and awful dualism of thought and language, of a man's outward aspect and his soul within,—this was *The Bells*, an almost literal translation of Erckmann and Chatrian's *Polish Jew*. Irving bought the MS. and offered it to his manager, Bateman, who tried it as a last chance. Irving acted Matthias, and in one evening the actor of talent became the actor of genius. Clement Scott hurried to his newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph*, and wrote so enthusiastic an account of the performance that next morning the editor chaffed him on the subject, and wanted to know who this Irving might be. In an article in the *Times*, John Oxenford analysed with much penetration that suggestive power of the actor, and that striking dualism of which I have spoken. Matthias, for all that idyllic existence in which everything succeeded with him and smiled upon him, seemed, said Oxenford, to wear the aspect of one living in a world of terrors, where all was torture and impending destruction. The horrors of the second and third acts would not have been intelligible, and would have missed their effect, if they had not been foreshadowed in the first by the glances, the tremors, the lapses into silence, the indescribable atmosphere of fatefulness which

seemed, under the bright morning sunshine, to envelop the murderer as with a shroud. The actor was to give proof of many other gifts, to traverse triumphantly every province of his art in the course of his splendid career, but it was by his psychological suggestiveness, by his engendering of fear, both physical and mental, that he won his first great theatrical victory.

The Bells was succeeded by *Charles I.*, by Wills. From the Alsatian inn-keeper to Charles Stuart was a big jump. Irving managed it without apparent effort.

It was as though the portrait by Van Dyck had stepped down from its frame—this stately figure with its cold and lofty aspect, the look of sadness in the eyes, the lips smiling bitterly under the thin moustache, the pale veined forehead that bore the seal of destiny. I seem still to see him, now playing with his children on the grass slopes of Hampton Court, now crushing Cromwell with his kingly scorn. That phrase of his—“Who’s this rude gentleman?” still rings in my ears. The picture of Charles clasping little Henriette and her younger brother in his arms in the heart-breaking farewell scene at the close is still before my eyes. . . . Then, in a village graveyard, that more terrible figure takes its place, the sombre phantom-form of Aram, long and lank, the assassin reasoning with his remorse.

In these fruitful years one creation followed another in quick succession, each excellent, all

different. Finally, on October 31, 1874, Irving appeared as Hamlet.

This was his Marengo; up to the third act, the battle seemed lost. His anguish must have been terrible. The audience was mute, frigid, and their frigidity seemed to increase. The third act produced a complete change. From the scene with the players and the description of the imaginary portraits the evening was a continual triumph. The public had before them a Hamlet they had never seen or even dreamt of; all the Hamlets that had ever appeared upon the stage seemed to have been assimilated by an original and powerful temperament, and blended harmoniously into one. *The Bells* had been played a hundred and fifty-one times, *Charles I.* eighty times. *Hamlet* filled the Lyceum for two hundred nights without interruption.

Irving took up *Richelieu* next, and in it strove victoriously against memories of Macready. At the close of the performance the house rose at him—men waved their hats in their enthusiasm in the midst of the wildest cheering. Such a scene had not been witnessed in an English theatre for half a century! It proclaimed Irving Kean's successor. As though to complete the rites of this coronation, the sword which clanked at his side when he played Richard III. was that which Kean had carried in the same rôle, and the ring which shone on his finger was a ring of Garrick's. A colleague, old Chippendale of the Haymarket, had given him the one; the other

was a present from the Baroness Burdett-Coutts. They formed, as it were, the insignia of royalty.

He continued to make himself master of all the great Shakespearian rôles, like a conqueror annexing provinces. Of course, he was not equally good in all, though to all he brought his understanding and his inspiration, and to all gave the stamp of his individuality. He sighed and sang of love as Romeo, railed and mocked at it as Benedick; raged with Othello, trembled with Macbeth; laid bare, as Wolsey, the inner working of the soul of the statesman-priest; as Lear, went raving over the desolate heath in the storm and the darkness of the night. Throughout he has had the co-operation of Miss Ellen Terry, an actress of the finest and most delicate talent, whose charm has resisted the passing of the years. Around them there has grown up a generation of younger actors and actresses, who to-day adorn the stages of other theatres.

Irving is to be looked on not merely as an interpreter of Shakespeare. Hardly less important has been his work in editing the plays for the modern theatre, and in staging them worthily: at the Lyceum he has given them a setting than which the great dramatist, had he lived in our days (and read Ruskin), could have wished for nothing better. He has told us in a few lines, which I regard as the expression of his mature judgment, the result of thirty years of theory and practice, what sort of staging is required for masterpieces. The *mise en scène*, he

tells us, should not give the spectator any separate impression, it should be in keeping merely with the impression of the piece. It should envelop the performers in an atmosphere, provide them with suitable surroundings, afford the special kind of lighting that is required for the action. Its rôle is a negative one. It should introduce no incongruity, no discordant note; that is all that is required. To attempt more is a mistake, and is apt to do injury to the general effect. Whenever I have been to the Lyceum I have found this programme strictly adhered to.

The restoration of Shakespeare's text, however, was a still more important achievement. Everyone congratulated him on his good sense in freeing us from Colley Cibber's version of *Richard III.* He continued the good work with all the other dramas he took up; and we have to thank him to-day for an "acting edition" of the Shakespearian masterpieces,—an actable Shakespeare that is yet a real Shakespeare. The principle which he has followed in this task may be summarised, I think, as follows:—Omissions, often; transpositions, sometimes; interpolations, never.

I am far from pretending that Irving as an actor is without fault, that he is not liable to go wrong like everyone else, that the richness of his artistic nature attains to universality. There can be no doubt that he is better as Richard III. than as Macbeth, as Benedick than as Romeo. The first time you see him, his play of feature seems exaggerated, his motions jerky and irregular.

A critic has compared his gait in *Hamlet* to that of a man hurrying over a ploughed field ; another critic has found in that curious gesture, which periodically throws up his shoulders and draws his head down into his collar-bone, a resemblance to the motion of a savage making ready to spring upon his foe. His elocution is far from being perfect,—a fact he has recognised himself, for he has worked hard to correct the defects of delivery which have been charged against him. But these are slight shortcomings of which a year of technical study at the outset of his career would have freed him completely.

A more serious drawback, to my mind, is that he is too great for many of his rôles, that he is out at elbow in them, so to speak. He himself has told us that the first duty of an actor is to fit his part, to *be* the character, to personate ; and, it must be admitted, that in following this principle he has given proof of a versatility unsurpassed by Garrick himself : yet it would seem that the greater he has grown by study and thought, (with the growth of his years and of his fame,) it has become more and more difficult for him to squeeze himself into the smaller personalities he has had to represent upon the stage, to sink in them that magnetic individuality of his own which constitutes his power, and to which he owes his success. Just as that young actor called out “Burbadge” instead of “Richard,” we also, in Irving’s case, forget the rôle, and see only the actor ; and the play assumes for us the

character of an admirable lesson in the art of recitation.

Although he reverences the great actors who have preceded him, Irving takes but little note of tradition. His method is essentially individual to himself, and he does not hesitate to recommend this method to all members of his profession, even beginners.

It may be said to have three phases, involving three successive processes. First, a patient and conscientious study of the text: it is essential to understand the author's meaning. When this has been mastered, you may trust to your instinct, to inspiration. Then, amongst the ideas thus discovered, you make your selection, of the good ones by a species of mental process which will enable you to reproduce them artificially at will.

Thus it is that Irving passes, smiling, by Diderot's paradox about the actor. Diderot is right, of course, when he says that the actor does not abandon himself on the stage to the promptings of inspiration; but he is wrong in concluding that the whole business of acting is mechanical. As Talma well expressed it in speaking of his own case, the emotions represented by an actor, and communicated through him to us, are often worked up from old experiences really met with and stored by study as material. But shall we exact from him that he should have a real craving to deceive when he impersonates a hypocrite? or that he should be in love with the actress who has to enact a love

scene with him? or thirst for blood when he accomplishes a stage murder? These violent and often contrary emotions—supposing, that is, that any one man should be capable of them—would paralyse the actor instead of inspiring him. We expect of him not that he should himself experience personally all these passions, but that he should understand and be able to portray them. What culture, though—what a combination of gifts, does this portrayal require and call into play! An actor may be in turn, painter, sculptor, poet, musician, psychologist, moralist, historian, and yet be inadequately equipped for his calling.

Does one go to the theatre to see life depicted upon the stage, or, on the contrary, to escape from life and forget it? Irving takes up a position half-way between the realist and that of the ultra-idealist. What one should see at the theatre is indeed life, but an intenser life, with emotions that are keener, a pulse that beats more quickly,—a life in which the potentialities of men and women are at their full, and in which there is a standard of good and evil to give a moral conclusion, a lesson in the art of living. "Get the working-man to go to the theatre," he declares; there is no better way of keeping him out of the public-house. The theatre should be really a school, should teach the young how to live, and reconcile the weary and the sad to their existence, by setting before them the ideal poetic justice which hovers over their heads.

This is the substance of the great actor's

teaching, as set forth by him on many occasions,—I shall not say in defence of his profession : the theatre, he has declared proudly, no longer needs to be defended—but rather in glorification of it. Quite recently, in an address to the Royal Society, in February 1895, he demonstrated that acting was truly one of the Fine Arts. Taking a definition of Taine's as his starting-point, he dealt with that great writer's opinions on the same plane of thought, in a style that was no less brilliant than clear and concise. Irving has too keen an appreciation of beauty of form not to be conscious of the value lent to his ideas by his method of expressing them. If he was not a writer born, he has made himself a writer ; his sentences are marked by a purity, a nobility, a lofty and serene simplicity which communicates to the reader the same spell his acting has wrought upon the spectator. His first lectures were full of good things, happy phrases and observations that set one thinking. In his later ones he has taken up the philosophy of his art, and has revealed the tireless ambition of an intelligence ever striving after higher things. To-day it has reached the summit. The royal decree, therefore, which entitled him "Sir Henry" in May 1895, could not have come at a more fitting moment. When this favour is bestowed on an official who has grown old in service, or on a major-general who can no longer mount a horse, the world takes no notice ; this everyday distinction dazzles only "my lady's" dressmaker

and the tradesmen with whom she deals. In Irving's case, it is an historical occasion, an epoch-making event. He is the first actor to be invested with the emblem of rank. What is for him a reality is a possibility for every actor. Thus he has raised them in being raised above them.

Irving seems to me—may I venture to say it without seeming unappreciative of the excellent and even great actors of whom our own country can boast?—to be pre-eminent in his art, the leader of his profession. He compels this admission by the beauty and unity of his life, by the splendid strength of his vocation, by the magnificent variety of his gifts, by his intelligent feeling for all the other arts and for the ideas which belong to the spirit of his time. And, on the other hand, by the slow growth, the gradual development of his talent, by his spirit of independence and initiative, tempered by regard for the past, he is one of the incarnations of his race, one of those men in whom to-day we may see most clearly the features of the English character. He has failed in nothing,—he has not even failed to make a fortune. And in respect to this, should anyone charge it against him as a fault, he has given his defence in a saying which I shall quote in conclusion as a finishing touch to his portrait:—“The drama must succeed as a business, if it is not to fail as an art.” And in truth, does Shakespeare cease to be Shakespeare because in Irving's hand he is also a mine of gold?

CHAPTER VII

Is it well to imitate Shakespeare?—The Death of the Classical Drama—Herman Merivale and the *White Pilgrim*—Wills and his Plays : *Charles the First*, *Claudian*—Tennyson as a Dramatist ; he comes too soon and too late—Tennyson and the Critics—*The Falcon*, *The Promise of May*, *The Cup*, *Becket*, *Queen Mary*, *Harold*.

IRVING'S personality has filled the preceding pages so completely that I have been unable to find space in which to do justice to those men and women who, near at hand, or from afar, have helped to uphold the Colossus upon the stage. Ellen Terry, first of all, who has not only been an incarnation, delicate, moving, impassioned, of Shakespeare's heroines, but who, even more perhaps than her illustrious colleague, has in her pure and sweet elocution set the poet's dream to music. From America have come Mary Anderson, whose statuesque attitudes are well remembered ; and, more recently, Ada Rehan, who gave us so modern and so alluring a Rosalind. It was possible for a critic to declare,—speaking of the vogue towards which everything seems to have worked,—that of all the dramatists of the day, Shakespeare was the most successful ; adding with truth, that, having been brought

into fashion in the theatre, Shakespeare in his turn had brought the theatre into fashion.

But is the resuscitation of Shakespeare productive of nothing but good? Has it not been accompanied by certain drawbacks which are still evident, and by certain dangers all of which have not been successfully surmounted? One has taken to doubting whether Shakespeare be really the best of guides for a new generation of dramatic writers, especially when one has studied closely what the imitation of Shakespeare involves in practice. To imitate Shakespeare is to copy in the most superficial manner his locutions and turns of phrase, his complicated plots, his successions of changing scenes; to mingle prose and verse, and to indulge in puns and *coups de théâtre*; above all, to assume certain mannerisms that are held to bear the stamp of the master. To come near him, on the other hand, it is not merely prose and verse that must alternate, but the realism and the poetry of which these are but the outward signs; it is not puns and *coups de théâtre* that are essential, but the power to divert and to move, which is quite another matter. Shakespeare's spirit is not to be assimilated; this is impossible to a man of our time: one can but dress oneself up in the cast-off garment which served as a covering to his genius. This garment does not suit us,—it is either too long or too short, or both together. One dresses up as Shakespeare for an hour, and resembles the great man about as much as a

lawyer's clerk, masquerading *en mousquetaire*, resembles d'Artagnan, or as the Turk of carnival time resembles the genuine Turk smoking his pipe outside his café in Stamboul. This tremendous model, all whose aspects we cannot see because it goes beyond the orbit of our perspective glass, oppresses and paralyses our intelligence: did one understand it, one would not be much the better off. It would be sheer folly to wish the modern English dramatist not to read his Shakespeare, for it is in Shakespeare that he will find the English character in all its length and breadth; let him absorb and steep himself in Shakespeare by all means: but let him then forget Shakespeare and be of his own time, let him not walk our streets of to-day in the doublet and hose of 1600. The choice has to be made between Shakespeare and life, for in literature, as in morals, it is not possible to serve two masters. It is possible that Shakespeare has been, and is still, the great obstacle to a free development of a national drama. Nor is there anything to be astonished at in this. The Shakespeare whom we know could not have been born when he was had there been another Shakespeare two and a half centuries before.

These are *a priori* considerations, but they are confirmed by the experience of the last twenty years. These years have seen the apotheosis of Shakespeare and the death of the classical drama. Amongst the last who tried to galvanise it into life, I hardly know what others to mention besides

Wills and Herman Merivale. In the drama entitled *The White Pilgrim*, Merivale achieved some really beautiful passages: in them may be felt the first thrill of those sombre and impalpable reveries, come towards us with the cool breath of the North, in which we find a balm for our fever. As for Wills, for a moment he gave rise to hopes. There was room for false expectations as to the future of his career. He was, says Mr. Archer, "so strong and so weak, so manly and so puerile, so poetic and so commonplace, so careful and so slovenly." His Bohemian life, his impassioned character, his hasty methods of production, added to the illusion, and gave him, in the distance, a look of genius. But it was a misleading look. I have seen two of his pieces, *Charles the First* and *Claudian*. The first called up on the stage—for the last time doubtless—that legend of the martyr king which the historical labours of Gardiner have shivered into atoms. And here is the story of Claudian. A man who has killed a monk falls for this crime under a curse which, instead of attaching itself to him, attaches itself to all those who cross his path. He does evil unwittingly, when he would fain do good; he brings about the death of those he loves. In the end he is saved. So that this horrible waste of human lives, this torrent of tears and blood, these sufferings, agonies, despairs, all serve but to gain a seat for a white-robed criminal at the banquet of Life Eternal. "In order that the world may be Claudian's purgatory, it must first be the hell

of an entire generation." Thus it is with all the pieces of Wills; they are founded upon conceptions which crumble away upon analysis, and the versification is too poor to veil or redeem the weakness of the dramatic idea.

Despite the efforts of Henry Arthur Jones and some other living writers, tragic verse, blank verse, the impression of which I have tried to characterise, is dead. Were there still authors to work in it, there would yet lack actors to speak it, and I do not know who would venture to chant it after Ellen Terry.

One name, however, comes to mind, a great name which it would be most unjust to overlook in this review of the contemporary drama,—the name of Tennyson. Mr. Archer has remarked that Tennyson, so fortunate in his life as a poet, was inopportune in his career as a dramatist. He wrote his plays too late and too early: too early for the public, and too late for his talent. As a matter of fact, he was sixty-six when he published *Queen Mary*, the first in date of the six pieces which constitute his dramatic output. That was twenty years ago, and the education of theatre-goers was far from being as advanced as it is now. It was not their fault if they brought to the poet a taste somewhat coarsened by the success of *Our Boys* and the *Pink Dominoes*, and a soul closed to the higher enjoyments of the imagination.

The actors did their duty, and even more than their duty, to the Laureate; it was the critics—and I am borne out in this by the most eminent

of their number,—it was the critics who decided the fate of Tennyson's plays; if they did not exactly condemn him unheard, at least they listened to him under the sway of prejudice. I shall borrow the sardonic expression of Mr. Archer: the critics were prepared to be disappointed—it was for this they came. What business had this old man to start on a new career, and a career requiring all the powers of youth? What induced him to believe that he had developed faculties at an age at which it is more usual to repeat and re-read oneself? Had a man any right to be a success in two trades at once? Was there not a law against this kind of pluralism, tacitly agreed upon by critics, and applied by them with remorseless rigour? For the beauty of these methods of reasoning, it was necessary that Tennyson should fail upon the stage; therefore he failed.

But as this check was an unfair one, he recovered from it, and his theatrical work, even when it is mediocre, even when it is bad, belongs to the living drama.

I myself have fallen into the common error. I spoke of Tennyson in 1885 as if the tomb had closed over him already. I may have been right in saying that in the garden of the poet, upon which winter had fallen, certain flowers would bloom no more. But what I did not perceive then, and what to-day is manifest to me and to many others, is the fact that the latter days of the poet not only preserved some of his early

graces, but brought out for us qualities which his youth had not known. He remained in touch with the mind of the humble until the very end. Moreover, he revealed himself a master in the art of giving expression in verse to the social and religious discussions which carry one away. He has displayed in his theatrical work an historical sense and a dramatic sense of the highest order, and if these two gifts have clashed sometimes to the point of cancelling each other, their combination at certain more fortunate moments had issue in some precious fragments of masterpieces. The slightest of all his pieces is *The Falcon*. The action takes place in some vague region in an Italy of romance; neither the scene nor the century is defined. It is like a tale by Boccaccio, but by a Boccaccio who is ingenuous and pure. Federigo, an impoverished gentleman, is in love, at a distance and without hope, with the rich and beautiful widow Monna Giovanna. His greatest possession, his pride and his joy, his only means, too, of securing a subsistence, is a wonderful falcon which he himself has trained for hunting. One morning Monna Giovanna pays him an unexpected visit, and, ignorant of the neediness of her neighbour, invites herself unceremoniously to lunch. Federigo, whose larder is empty, kills his favourite bird, that he may serve it up for the lady. It happens that it was this very falcon that the lady had come to beg for, to fall in with the fancy of a sick child. Federigo is obliged to acknowledge the sacrifice to which hospitality

and her love impelled him, and Monna Giovanna is so keenly touched by it that she falls, and for ever, into his arms.

When *The Falcon* was put before the public in 1879 at the St. James's Theatre, John Hare, who is a manager of cultured taste as well as an excellent comedian, had mounted it with the utmost care, and had given it a *mise en scène* that was at once realistic and poetic. Federigo and Monna Giovanna were impersonated by the Kendals, and those who saw Madge Robertson's performance think of it as one thinks of some painter's masterpiece seen in the picture galleries of Italy or Germany. In mere outward form, her Giovanna was a pendant to her Galatea. But neither the charm of the scenery, nor the perfection of the acting, nor the music of the verse, could obtain a long life for the piece. It was not to be expected that there would be more than a few hundreds of elect spectators to delight in this delicate trifle, the joy of an hour, the enthusiasm of an evening. From the morrow, Cockneydom was obliged to recapture the house, and call out for its wonted entertainment. The critics made common cause with Cockneydom, but from reasons less foreign to art.

They pointed out that if there is any subject at all in *The Falcon*, it is apparently Federigo's sacrifices. Now this subject, such as it is, is not dealt with. Two words in an aside to his servant, a whispered order, that is all that leads up to and justifies the death-sentence on the bird. Even

more deceptive than the *déjeuner* offered to Monna Giovanna, the *menu* presented by Lord Tennyson to his spectators was composed but of delicate *hors d'œuvres*, and there was not enough in them for healthy appetites.

The Promise of May had a worse fate than *The Falcon*. It failed outright. A certain section of the public pretended to believe that the poet spoke through the mouth of his hero when he denounces, with so much bitterness and so indiscriminately, the principles and prejudices upon which society has its base. These spectators were sadly wanting both in patience and in intelligence. Harold's theories are answered in the play. When he has been declaiming upon the evil that religions have wrought upon man, Dora does her best to show him the good influences they have wielded. Whereas he prophesies the imminent and universal abolition of the bonds of marriage, Dora sets forth with simplicity, yet not without grace and feeling, her ideal of a perfect union of man and wife. "And yet I had once a vision of a pure and perfect marriage, where the man and the woman, only differing as the stronger and the weaker, should walk hand-in-hand together down this valley of tears, as they call it so truly, to the grave at the bottom, and lie down there together in the darkness which would seem but for a moment, to be wakened again together by the light of the resurrection, and no more partings for ever and ever."

In the first part of the play, too, when Harold pulls down for Eve a branch of an apple-tree in blossom, this farmer's daughter looks upon it sadly. “Next year,” she says, “it will bear no fruit,”—a moving piece of symbolism; one likes to see a poet condemning in this way the morality of the impulse which, in plucking the flower, forbids it to bring forth the fruit, and destroys the very seeds of the future.

The comparative success of *The Cup* at the Lyceum surprises me less than it does Mr. Archer. I see no need to seek the secret of this success in the grace of Ellen Terry, or in the splendid scenery of Diana's Temple. *The Cup* has certain qualities which were calculated to please the general public. The subject is taken from Plutarch's *De Claris Mulieribus*, and from a passage which had already suggested a tragedy to a Frenchman, a German, and an Italian. It is possible that, without being quite conscious of it, Tennyson adopted to a certain point the tone of the original author and the manner of his predecessors. He was less English, less Shakespearian, less himself, in this piece than in his other dramatic works. The dialogue is rapid and effective; the characters do not give themselves up to poetical fancies; instead of formulating theories, they express sentiments that are in no way complex or strange. One of them, Synorix, is interesting. Except for the Don Juanism which seems to impart to him too modern a note, this double-faced type, half Roman, half barbarian,

whose intelligence has been sharpened but whose passions have not been extinguished by civilisation, is an exceptional creature, a sort of monster, who is conscious of his intellectual superiority and his moral decay ; he unites these two qualities in a sadness that has about it something that seems great.

The attractiveness of this character was what made a failure of Tennyson's piece ; the English poet avoids the subject which Plutarch puts before him, and which Thomas Corneille and Montanelli had seized upon ; the latter, cleverly and with success, despite the inflation of his style. This subject lies in the action of Camma, widow of the Tetrarch of Galatia, whom Synorix, with the aid of the Romans, has killed and supplanted. Synorix loves her, and is anxious to make her his wife. Camma, seeing no escape from this odious marriage, pretends to assent to it. After the sacred rites she has to put her lips to the same cup as Synorix before the altar of Diana. She gives him death to drink from it, and drinks death from it herself. That this *dénouement* should awaken no objections in our mind, it would be essential that we should have been brought to hate Synorix as Camma hates him. Now, Tennyson seems to have done everything in his power to minimise the repulsiveness of the character. He has woven round him the fascination of a noble sadness, the palliation of a great love ; has in some sort constrained him to kill his rival, by importing into the action an element of

justifiable self-defence. Not content with this, he depicts Camma's husband as an unintelligent brute, who ill deserves her regrets and her sacrifice.

It may be added, that of the real drama—the conflict of emotion in Camma's soul—we know nothing until the last scene. A *coup de théâtre* does not make a play, and Mr. Archer is doubtless right in placing the work of Montanelli above that of Tennyson; but these defects notwithstanding, I think *The Cup* would be accorded the same favourable reception from the public again now that it enjoyed in 1881. It bears a distinct resemblance to our French tragedies, in its dignity, its propriety, in the seriousness, the freedom from any comic element, by which it is marked, by the consistency in the characters, its continuity of tone and unity of action,—qualities which undoubtedly give more pleasure, whatever may be said to the contrary, than the most faithful imitation of the contrasts and inconsistencies of life.

Had he written nothing but *The Falcon*, *The Cup*, and *The Promise of May*, Tennyson would hold but a very low place among play-writers. If he is to live as a dramatist, it must be by his three historical plays, *Queen Mary*, *Harold*, and *Becket*.

These dramas, it has been declared, were bound to be inferior, even before they ever saw the light, to the historical dramas of the age of Elizabeth, whose aspect and character they

recalled so completely ; for whereas the histories of Shakespeare and his contemporaries were hewn out of the old Chronicles which, almost equally with reminiscences, preserve the vivacity of personal impressions, and something, as it were, of the warmth of life, Tennyson's dramas are taken from "History," properly so called, and "History" is a serious scientific person who studies life by dissecting it, who is addicted to discussion rather than to the telling of tales, and who substitutes modern judgments for ancient passions. The objection is more plausible than real. First of all, this definition of History, though true enough of a Guizot, a Hallam, or a Lecky, is quite inapplicable to a Carlyle, a Michelet, or a Taine.

In reading Freeman and Froude, was Tennyson less in touch with the soul of the past than Shakespeare was in making his way through the cold and often tedious pages of Holinshed? Moreover, even had Froude been as sententious and frigid as he was in reality picturesque and impassioned, Tennyson's own faculties would have made good these defects.

It may be well at this point to attempt to do justice to the delicacy and quite exceptional strength of Tennyson's sense of history. I must explain clearly what I mean by sense of history. I do not refer to the critical faculty of the historian, but to the gift bestowed upon few, of living over again in imagination the emotions of a century long gone to dust. It was thus that Michelet was

present at the doing to death of Joan of Arc ; Macaulay at the flight of James II. and at the trial of Warren Hastings ; Carlyle at the taking of the Bastille, at the return from Varennes, and at the battle of Marston Moor. Had the men and the scenes been really painted upon their retina, the effect upon the brain could not have been stronger. This intellectual vision of theirs is worth a hundred times more than the actual physical vision of such men as Holinshed and Ayala.

This rare gift belonged to Tennyson, and took in him that feminine acuteness which was in harmony with all his poetical faculties. As evidence of this, take the by-play in his historical dramas,—that is to say, all that is not essential in them, the mere accessories, illustrations of manners, minute traits of character, scraps of history ; for instance, the account of the marriage of Philip and Mary, and that of the execution of Lady Jane Grey by Bagenhall, in *Queen Mary*, and in *Becket* the sarcasm directed against the Church of Rome by Walter Map, the witty precursor of the bitter and sombre Langland.

A Bulwer or a Tom Taylor may be able to cut out bits from the Chronicles, and introduce historic utterances into their flabby and declamatory prose, but beyond and underneath these words, will they be able, like Tennyson, to set before us *in état d'âme*, and plunge us into the depth of the life of olden days ?

I am fully aware, of course, that this is not

everything, or rather that it is nothing, unless the poet possesses also the dramatic faculty. Is there a dramatic idea underlying *Becket*, *Queen Mary*, and *Harold*? I shall reply after the manner of the Gentlemen of the Jury: No, to the first question; Yes, to the second and third.

It is true that *Becket* achieved a startling success in the summer of 1892. But three-fourths of the success were due to Irving. Those who have been long familiar with the great actor, know how episcopal he is—hieratical, pontifical. Mediæval asceticism is one of the forms of life which his artistic personality fills most perfectly, and fits into most easily; I know of only one other man who could have represented Becket nearly as well, and that was Cardinal Manning. It was well worth one's while to travel far, and put up with hours of boredom, to be present at that symbolical game of chess, in which the struggle between the bishop and the king foreshadowed the whole piece; to hear that absorbing dialogue in which Becket recounts to his confidential friend his tragic career and his prophetic dreams, and that stormy discussion, too, at Northampton, when the archbishop puts his signature to the famous constitutions and then cancels it; and to witness the scene of the murder. A scene which follows history, step by step, and which, by the way, might have been carried through by dumb show without words at all.

Those who saw Irving, mitred and crozier in hand, totter under the blow, and fall upon the

altar steps, whilst the chanting of the monks came in gusts from the church above—mingled with the cries of the people beating against the door, and the rumbling of the thunder shaking the great edifice to its foundation—experienced one of the strongest emotions any spectacle ever gave.

And yet there is no drama in the piece, for a drama involves a situation which develops and changes, a plot which works out. The duel between the king and prelate in the play, no less than in our history books, is merely a succession of indecisive encounters. The metamorphosis of the courtier-soldier into the bishop-martyr is indicated hardly at all by the poet. And what is one to say of the love idyll appended to the historical drama, in spite of history, in spite of the drama itself? All Ellen Terry's tact did not suffice to save this insipid Rosamund. The complications surrounding the mysterious retreat of this young woman savour more of farce even than of melodrama, and as for the facetious details by which this episode is enlivened, they form so common and flat a piece of comic relief, that one listens to them ashamed and ill at ease. I may observe silence on this point, in order to avoid the ungrateful function of ridiculing a man of genius, but I cannot refrain from protesting against the irreparable error Tennyson committed in dragging Becket into this shady intrigue, and giving him the king's mistress to care for at the very time when he is holding the king in check with so much hardihood.

I have not the same objections to make against *Queen Mary* and *Harold*. In the first piece, the human psychological drama, which is half submerged in history, but not so as to be out of sight, is the development of the character and of the sad destiny of this unfortunate queen; the road, strewn first with flowers and then paved with sharp-edged stones and lined with thorns, along which she passed, in so brief a period, from a protracted youth to a premature old age, from irrepressible joyousness to agonising solitude, misfortune, and despair. Here was a life thrice bankrupt. As queen, she dreamt of the greatness of her country, and left it under the blow of a national humiliation, the loss of Calais. As a Catholic, she strove to restore her religion, and, far from succeeding, she dug a chasm between Rome and her people which the centuries have not sufficed to fill. As a woman, she loved a man of marble, an animated stone: her heart was crushed by him, and broke. She was to learn before her death the failure of all her projects; she read contempt and disgust in the eyes of the man she worshipped, the man to whom she had offered human sacrifices to win his favour. This is the drama Tennyson sketched out, if he did not quite complete it, in *Queen Mary*.

The subject of *Harold* stands out more clearly, in stronger relief. It is the struggle of religious faith against patriotism and ambition. All the feelings that are at variance, are indicated with a power worthy of the great master of the drama

in the successive scenes which take place at the Court of William when Harold is a prisoner. After the political aspect of things has been set forth by the old Norman lord, there comes the episode in which Wulfuoth, Harold's young brother, describes to him the slow tortures of the prison-life, the living death of the prisoner, deprived of all that he loves best,—of the sight of the green fields, of the blue of sky and sea, as of the society of men ; his name gone out of memory, eaten away by oblivion, as he, in his dungeon, is being eaten away by the loathsome vermin of the earth.

When Harold has yielded, it is moving to see him bow down with Edith in a spirit of Christian resignation, and sacrifice, as ransom of his violated oath, his personal happiness to his duty as a king. The dilemma changes, and its two new aspects are personified by two women, whose rivalry has in it nothing of the banality, or of the vulgar outbursts of jealousy, to which we are too often treated in the theatre.

Edith gives up the hero to Aldwyth while he lives ; dead, she reclaims him, with a nobility and pride of tone that thrill one.

These two dramas—I dare not say two master-pieces—set in a framework of history, which in itself is infinitely precious, form the legacy left by the great lyrist to the theatre of his country.

A pious hand, to extricate these two dramas from the rest, and so let in air and light upon

their essential lines ; a great actor, to understand and incarnate Harold ; a great actress, to throw herself into the character of Mary,—and Tennyson would take his proper place amongst the dramatists.

NOTE.—I have decided to make no reference here to the dramas of Browning or Mr. Swinburne. These belong rather to the history of poetry than that of the theatre.

CHAPTER VIII

The Three Publics—The Disappearance of Burlesque and Decadence of Pantomime—Increasing Vogue of Farce and Melodrama—Improvement in Acting—The Influence of our French Actors—The “Old” Critics and the “New”—James Mortimer and his Two “Almavivas”—Mr. William Archer’s Ideas and Rôle—The Vicissitudes of Adaptation.

Is it not a sign of the times that the Lyceum should have been filled through two consecutive months, in the midst of the heat of summer, by a reverent crowd, come to listen to and to applaud *Becket*?

Attribute it, if you will, partly to Irving, partly to fashion, the fact remains, that fifty or sixty thousand persons showed a keen, a passionate interest in this struggle between Mind and Power—between the National Throne and the Roman Priesthood—resuscitated by a poet. Many other symptoms go with this one, and confirm it.

I do not wish to assert that low tastes and vulgarity have gone out of London: nothing could be more untrue. Never has the *bête humaine* been so completely at large there; never has sensualism, since the distant days of George IV., and those more distant still of Charles II., held its way so unblushingly. But these tastes

are catered for in certain special resorts. Every evening in the year more than thirty music halls spread out before the multitude a banquet of indelicacies that are but slightly veiled, and of flesh scarcely veiled at all. So much the worse for morality. So much the better for art. For, this being so, nothing is looked for in the theatres except emotion and ideas. All the ideas may not be right, nor all the emotions healthy. No matter. The *bête humaine* is outside the door.

I have told of the initial vogue of burlesque at the Royalty and the Strand. This vogue was later to bring fortune to a larger and more luxurious theatre, the Gaiety, under Nellie Farren, as the successor to Mrs. Bancroft, whose former rôles she vulgarised to a remarkable degree. If you mention her name before an elderly "man about town," who was young and went the pace from 1865 to 1875, you will set his eye aflame. To-day you hear no more of Nellie Farren, no more of burlesque.

The operetta, too, is vegetating; the pantomime serves hardly to amuse the children. Of inferior dramatic forms, two still survive, and have even extended their clientèle. Farce has called for elbow-room; it takes three acts now, instead of one, to spread itself in. Melodrama, which used to inhabit only outlandish regions, chiefly to the East and South,—districts of London whose geography was hardly known,—at the Surrey, the Victoria, the Grecian, the Standard, returned

once again to the charge. It holds sway at Drury Lane, the Adelphi, and the Princess's. In that immense conglomeration of human beings, of which London boasts, there is a third public for these two popular forms of the drama, an uncultured but respectable public, which is to be confounded neither with the public of the music halls nor with that of the great theatres in which the literary drama and the light comedy are produced. The persisting, and even growing, popularity of farce and melodrama, is not a disquieting symptom. These forms meet mental requirements that are primitive, but quite legitimate. It is hardly necessary to prove that it is a good thing to make people laugh, and that this laugh is a beginning of their education. Those who despise the absurdities of melodrama do not reflect that the very acceptance of these absurdities reveals an idealising instinct in the masses which people of culture often lack.

When dealing with Irving, I asked the question, so often discussed, whether we go to the theatre to see a representation of life, or to forget life and seek relief from it. Melodrama solves this question, and shows that both theories are right, by giving satisfaction to both desires, in that it offers the extreme of realism in scenery and language together with the most uncommon sentiments and events. These multitudes who delight in the plays of R. Buchanan and G. R. Sims, or even—to descend a degree lower—of Merritt and Pettitt, often pass quite naturally to

Shakespeare, for there is a melodrama in every drama of Shakespeare's; and were it not for the archaism of the language, this melodrama would thrill the people to-day, in 1895, as it did in 1595.

Melodrama does not lack its moral, but the moral is always incomplete, in that it is the issue of an accident. A foot-bridge over a torrent breaks under the steps of the villain; a piece of wall comes down and shatters him; a boiler bursts, and blows him to atoms. These people should be taught that a criminal's punishment ought to be the natural outcome of his own misdeeds. Will they ever be brought to understand? If not, at least their children will, and will take their seats beside us in the same places of entertainment. But in their place, new strata of uncultured spectators will appear, who will continue to call out for melodrama.

As for the literary drama and for comedy, whose destinies I am here following, they have been cultivated only by the Lyceum, the Haymarket, the Garrick, the St. James's, the Court, and the Comedy; I should add, perhaps, the Criterion, where, under the management of that excellent actor, Charles Wyndham, they have often found a home. The *personnel* of these theatres presents a remarkably distinguished body of actors and actresses, ceaselessly recruited and strengthened. We have seen the advances that have been made by the profession as regards its material well-being, its personal dignity, and

social status. It has made a yet more notable advance in the matter of intelligence. To what is this due? To observation, to study, to that striving after improvement by which individuals, and classes, and communities are set in movement and kept going. Twenty or twenty-five years ago a manager's first question of a girl coming to him for an engagement would be—"Can you sing? Can you dance? Have you got good legs?" To-day his first requirement would be that she should have intelligence.

English actors and actresses owe much to ours. Sarah Bernhardt especially, and now Réjane, have exerted an influence so decided that it might be made the subject of a separate study; and the visits of the Comédie Française are regarded in England as events. Clement Scott, in his *Thirty Years at the Play*, tells, as only a genuine playgoer could, of the improvised performance given by our comedians at the Crystal Palace, after the banquet given to them by the theatrical world of London. That evening Favart and Delaunay played *On ne badine pas avec l'Amour* before the keenest and most impressionable of "pits," composed exclusively of actors and authors. When, at the *dénouement*, there was heard the sound of a fall behind the scenes and of a muffled cry, and Favart appeared, pallid to the lips, and rushed across the stage, like a whirlwind of despair, crying out, "*Elle est morte! Adieu Perdican!*"—so exquisite was the sense of anguish, that the

audience forgot to applaud, and there was a second of strange stupor, of respectful silence, as if in the presence of some real catastrophe: the finest tribute ever paid to histrionic talent. I should not be surprised if that evening marked a date in the career of more than one English actor.

Dramatic criticism had at last emerged from that lowly and precarious stage of existence in which I have shown it in the first part of this study. It had now the independence and intelligence which were required to enable it to aid in the movement which was shaping, and even to take a large part in it. When the history of the English stage of the nineteenth century comes to be written, place must be reserved in it for men like Dutton Cook, Moy Thomas, Clement Scott, and all those who, having made their first appearance during the years of drought and famine, have led the community of critics, and with it the whole of the people of Israel, out of the land of bondage. It is not so long since the critic sold his soul for an advertisement; since Chatterton, who, from being a theatrical attendant, had become the master of three theatres, and who suffered his toadies to call him the "Napoleon of the Theatrical World," would fain have had Clement Scott, of the *Weekly Despatch*, dismissed from his post, and presumed to deny him the *entrée* to his theatres, and even to refuse his money at the ticket-office; since the actor who had been criticised appealed to the jury, and the jury, being composed of business men, and looking at the

case always from a business standpoint, decided invariably in the actor's favour ;—for the truer the adverse criticism, the more injury it did to its object.

Truly, there were some hard years to weather. Perhaps one of the men to whom criticism owes its emancipation most is James Mortimer, the founder of the *London Figaro*. An American by birth, Mortimer lived for many years in Paris ; he was known to Napoleon III., and it was in the palace of St. Cloud that I made his acquaintance. He possessed a thorough knowledge of our drama, no less than of our politics, and when his newspaper, by reason of the withdrawal of certain financial support, from being a daily, became a weekly or bi-weekly, Mortimer gave plenty of room and plenty of freedom to criticism. He not only opened his columns to Clement Scott and William Archer, but, far from disclaiming connection with them in cases of complaint, he backed them up sturdily, and I have seen him, with his hat on the side of his head, staring boldly at a gang who hooted at him as he entered the theatre. The gallant and witty little journal has lived its life ; Mortimer himself, since that time, has fallen upon hard times in his career as publisher. It is not the less one's duty to accord him, under the eye of French theatre-goers, the tribute due to him, and paid to him by his old colleagues ; so that, having undertaken the toil, he should now carry some of the honour, the victory being won and the barbarian driven from the theatre.

The critics have often made mistakes since that time, have erred in their judgments, have condemned good pieces and glorified bad ones, have pandered to vanity and spite, have backed up speculators and cliques, have abused their new power, and fallen back to their old feebleness; but, on the whole, dramatic criticism in England is worth more to-day than it was yesterday, and this must content us—this is as much as we have any right to expect.

The London Figaro was published in a mean little shop near Old Temple Bar, facing the site where the Law Courts were to be erected. Two writers in succession undertook the theatrical chronicle, and signed it with the pseudonym of "Almaviva." The reader is already acquainted with the real names of "Almaviva I." and "Almaviva II."; he has encountered them several times in these pages. Clement Scott and William Archer had only a difference of a few years between them, but they represented in their profession two periods, schools, temperaments, that were absolutely opposed. Scott was the critic of the Robertsonian era; Archer is the critic of the drama of to-day, and to a certain point of the drama of to-morrow.

Mr. Archer's passion for the theatre—he has told us in a charming preface addressed to his friend, Robert Lowe, how this passion began in him—dates from his earliest youth, and it was entirely free from any alloying element. He has never written plays; or, at least, has never put

them on the stage. On principle, he has abstained from frequenting the green-room, and from personal intercourse with actors. He has devoted himself entirely to his critical mission; and, to carry it through the better, he has studied the past of the national drama and every kind of dramatic literature, living and dead. Mr. Archer is an encyclopædia, a library of references, but, unlike so many men of learning, his every item of exact information goes side by side with some pregnant thought, some suggestive idea; not content to instruct, he thinks and sets one thinking. He is at once a penetrating critic and a first-rate *petit journaliste*. Humour, of which he is full, flows freely through all his writings; an easy, limpid, lively, delicate humour, in which I have never detected a lapse of taste or a touch of pedantry. I don't believe that in all his life he has perpetrated an obscure or insipid line; in fact, he could not become a bore, if he would.

The best way of giving French readers an idea of him would be to compare him with one of our dramatic critics of this generation, or of that which preceded it, and to show in what respects he resembles, for instance, M. Francisque Sarcey or M. Jules Lemaître, and in what respects he differs from them. But the comparison is impossible, because their positions and circumstances are even further removed than their talents. The excellent writers whom I have mentioned are with us the guardians and interpreters of a tradition consecrated by masterpieces;

they strengthen or refine it, now by the vivacity and gaiety, now by the delicacy and grace, of their personal impressions. The public to whom they address themselves is more *blasé* than ignorant, and has more need to be stirred up than to be taught. William Archer, on the contrary, is an initiator; he has had to hew a passage for himself through a forest of prejudices; he has had always to go back to the elements of his subject, to demonstrate principles which, with us, are taken for granted,—to accomplish, in fact, a task which bears some resemblance to that of Lessing in the *Dramaturgie* of Hamburg. Were one to extract from the thousands of articles which he has published during the last twenty years the questions which he has set himself to discuss, one would amass a sufficiently complete code upon all the problems, great and small, which touch upon the arts and professions of actor, playwright, and critic.

His conception of the theatre is a very wide one. He regards it as a meeting-place, a *rendez-vous*, of all the arts. Its province, he holds, is co-extensive with life itself. He welcomes all forms and all kinds, provided they are not exotic growths, and answer to some need of the soul of the people. Thus melodrama is but an illogical tragedy for him. As for farce, he cares nothing for its progress; for although a really lively farce is worth more than a pretentious and unsuccessful drama, it would be folly to judge it by æsthetic laws. One does not take the height of a sugar-

loaf, he remarks, from barometric observations. The drama can exist outside the domain of literature. It was thus with the English drama ten or fifteen years ago. The business of criticism, Mr. Archer holds, was to raise it to the dignity of a department of literature, to reconcile it with literature. What sort of criticism was required to this end? Analytical or dogmatic, comparative, anecdotal or facetious? They may all be resorted to, each in its own place and time, provided only that they are sincere and independent.

Every piece should contain these three elements: a picture, a judgment, and an ideal. On the first rests the great question of realism on the stage. Mr. Archer has put the objections to realism in the form of a dilemma. "Either you show me on the stage," he says, "what I see and go through myself every day; in which case, where is the point of it—what do I learn from it? Or else you put before me things, ideas, and modes of life of which I know nothing; and how am I to determine their degree of truth and reality?" To this he replies himself, that the theatre obliges us to observe—that is to say, to see and feel more intensely—what we see and feel in our daily life, without taking much notice of it and without reflecting upon it. As for the sensations we have never experienced, and of the depicting of which we are unable, therefore, to judge the truth, the English critic pins his faith to an intuitive sense, which accepts or refuses the portrayal of an unknown world. When Zola describes the

financial methods of the Second Empire, when Pierre Loti transports us to the side of Rarahu or of Chrysanthème, an infallible instinct tells the reader if it be truth or fancy. Why should not the spectator also be endowed with the same critical instinct?

Mr. Archer will not allow that the Robertsonian comedy had this realistic character; or he maintains, at least, that if it ever had it, it very soon lost it. The author kept pouring hot water into the famous tea-pot until there was nothing to offer the public but an insipid decoction, whose staleness he tried in vain to hide by alternating it with the bitterness of French coffee, accompanied by the inevitable cognac. The English drama, Matthew Arnold had written, lay between the heavens and the earth—it was neither realistic nor idealistic, but just “fantastic.” Mr. Archer took up Matthew Arnold’s idea, and carried it a step further. Over and beyond the portrayal of manners and of character, the theatre puts before us a succession of events, a phase of life, upon which we are to pronounce judgment. It was in this field that the critic had entirely new truths to put before his countrymen. The English drama thought itself very moral; the critic deprived it of, and set it free from, this illusion. He was inclined even to admit the truth of M. Got’s declaration, that our drama was the more moral of the two; or rather, he held, that whereas the French drama was deficient in morality, the English drama had no morality at all. Does a

play become moral by having for its climax the destruction of the villain and the rewarding of virtue, that triumph of good which is lost in the general rummaging for overcoats and shuffling of feet? No; a play is moral if it works out a psychological situation, a problem of conduct to which it suggests or allots a right solution. Now, Mr. Archer could see no drama in 1880 written upon this model; nothing but colourless sentimentalities, a minute corner of life, and for sole problem the antagonism of poverty and riches, ever smoothed over by love.

He wished to see soaring above every dramatic work, an aspiration towards better things, towards a life superior to our common life, — the life, perhaps, of to-morrow.

He wished the theatre to have an ideal; not a retrospective, and, so to speak, reactionary ideal, as so often happens in a country where tradition retains its force, and where it is held that there is no reform like that of restoration; but an ideal of advance and progress.

His articles were like a series of vigorous shakes to a sleeper. Any kind of effort, he maintained, was better than apathy. He cast about in every direction, ransacked every hole and corner, raised every imaginable question, whether of trade or theory. Up to what point may Shakespeare be imitated with profit? Is the censorship more favourable to manners than it is oppressive to talent? Is the establishment of a national theatre, which should serve

at once as a school and a standard, a practicable idea? And would such an institution really help to the perfecting of the art? What is one to think of Diderot's paradox about the actors' art, and what do actors think of it themselves? What was the social position of actors in former times, and what will it be in the future? Will they be respected because of their profession, like the judge, the clergyman, the officer, or only in spite of it? What are the rights and the duties of the critic? What are the dangers, and what the advantages, inherent in the system which leaves all the great theatres in the hands of actor-managers? Ought the English dramatist to accept the collaboration of the actor-manager, and to what extent? These are some of the questions he has discussed and answered with a variety of information, a freedom of judgment, an unfailing argumentative power that command our respect even when our own opinions are at variance with his.

This is not all. Perhaps the most important part of Mr. Archer's rôle has consisted in his labours in connection with the dramatic literature of foreign countries. He was one of the first to make known the Norwegians and the Germans; and better than anyone else he has understood the works of our French dramatists, and realised to what account they were to be turned in the development of the English stage. Of the influence exerted by Ibsen and Björnson on the generations of to-day and to-morrow, I shall

speak later. Here I shall indicate only the new way in which French works have come to be adapted since 1875 and 1880; a curious movement of which Mr. Archer is by no means the sole author, but of which he has been a very attentive and perspicacious observer, and to which his counsels have lent, as it were, a character of scientific precision.

The way in which the English used to imitate our pieces half a century ago resembled the hasty procedure of a band of thieves plundering a house, doing their utmost, but against time and without method, and in consequence burdening themselves with worthless nick-nacks and overlooking jewels of price. When the London managers came to Paris post haste, vieing with each other for our manuscripts, and resorting to every kind of dodge to secure the prize, it was sometimes but the potentiality of becoming bankrupt that was thus held up, as it were, to auction.

From 1850 to 1880 they took everything indiscriminately, translating sometimes a second and a third time the same inept *vaudeville*. A melodrama from the Boulevard du Temple, but long forgotten there, became the *Ticket of Leave Man*, a play whose success is not yet exhausted; on the other hand, a great comedy by Augier or Feuillet, still to be found in our repertory, would languish and die after a few weeks before the indifference of the English pit, without anybody's attempting to draw a moral from the

event. But the legal aspect of things began to alter; the idea of international literary property had been started, and was making way. The successive steps were as follows. The principle was settled by an Act of Parliament in 1852; the foreign author retained his copyright for five years, but this affected translation only, adaptation not being covered by the laws; then it was sufficient to add a character, or to invert two scenes, to evade all dues. In 1875 a new law brought adaptation into the same category as translation. Finally, in 1887 as the result of the Treaty of Berne, and the interesting discussions which led up to it, an Order in Council laid it down in black and white, that the literary property of foreigners is, in every respect, identical with that of the natives of this country, and is protected in the same way.

These are very liberal provisions, and do honour to the statesmen to whom we owe them, but I am obliged to say they have greatly reduced the importation of French goods into the English theatrical market, and that they threaten it with complete extinction in the future. One has to think twice before taking up a piece which is burdened with the necessity of paying two authors; it seems preferable to study our methods, and learn from us, if possible, how to dispense with us. Nothing has contributed so efficaciously, for some years past, to the progress of the native English drama.

It is here that the teaching of the critic comes in, with the *flair* of the actor-manager.

From the English point of view, there are two kinds of pieces included in the domain of our *Haute Comédie*.

The one, including such plays as those of Dumas and Augier, requires almost literal translation, and ought to be put before the public as finished specimens of Parisian civilisation and art; to alter them would be to spoil them—*sint ut sunt aut non sint*. It is different with the pieces of M. Sardou. Once you have torn off the outer covering, and detached the thousand adventitious details with which the French author has ingeniously set out his subject, there remains an idea to be worked out, an idea with a strong foundation, capable of supporting an entirely new structure. It is possible to make an entirely English thing out of the excellent foreign materials from which one has chosen. It is a matter of taste, adroitness, and inspiration, and I quite understand this kind of work having a certain fascination for the playwright.

To understand thoroughly the process of adaptation, we ought to have been in a certain first-class carriage on the way from Paris to Calais one spring morning in 1878. It was occupied by three Englishmen, Mr. Bancroft, Mr. Clement Scott, and Mr. Stephenson. They had been present at the performance of *Dora* on the previous evening. Bancroft had bought the English right from M. Michaelis, who had himself

bought them from M. Sardou. How were they to make an English play out of it? Someone suggested the introduction of the Eastern Question, which at the moment, under the sedulous treatment of Disraeli, was stirring British *amour propre*. All the music halls were re-echoing the refrain, "But by jingo if we do." The idea hit upon was to turn this jingoism to account in the adaptation, by making Disraeli collaborate with Sardou. "By the time we got out at Amiens to drink our *bouillon*," one of them tells us, "the play was fully planned out." And, under the title of *Diplomacy*, *Dora* enjoyed an even more brilliant success in England than it had had in France.

This, of course, was only a combination of smartness and good luck. The new kind of adaptation was in sight, however, which was to have the double advantage of evading the law and elevating the art. All that was taken from the French author was a social thesis, a dramatic situation, a moral problem. Thesis, situation, and problem were carried bodily into the midst of English life, provided only that English life allowed of them. Then, in complete disregard of the original, a solution was sought for afresh. If a new *dénouement* resulted, a solution quite opposed to that in the French play, it was felt to be so much the better, for in this case the adaptation was seen to be independent, and it had but opened the field to a fruitful and suggestive comparison between the

two races, the two arts, and the two codes of morality.

This is where we stand at present: this form of adaptation is the more interesting of the two, and constitutes the last stage previous to the era of complete emancipation, of absolute originality.

CHAPTER IX

The Three Principal Dramatists of To-day—Sydney Grundy ; his First Efforts—Adaptations : *The Snowball*, *In Honour Bound*, *A Pair of Spectacles*, *The Bunch of Violets*—His Original Plays—His Style—His Humour—His Ethical Ideal—*An Old Jew*—*The New Woman*—A Talent which has not done growing.

IF you were to ask a London theatre-goer to name the most popular dramatists of the present day, to designate the ripened talents which tell most clearly of the present and of the future of the English drama, I think I may affirm that the names that would come immediately to his lips, with scarcely a moment's pause for reflection, are those of Arthur Wing Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, and Sydney Grundy. There would doubtless be some demurrings on the part of those contrary or eccentric spirits who will never admire except out of opposition and in disagreement, not merely with the uncultured many, but with the critical few. The theatre has its sects and its chapels, or rather, its crypts and its unknown idols, to whom a dozen votaries offer incense with weird rites. But we have no time to study the vagaries of individual minds. A *plébiscite* of West-End playgoers would certainly

point to the three men whose names I have mentioned as the leaders of the dramatic movement of the day.

They all began work about the same time—a score of years ago, as nearly as possible. They have encountered the same difficulties. Their progress has been slow. The commencement of their career was marked by vain efforts and misdirected labour: whether it was that opportunity was lacking, or that they could not find their way, certainly no one of them gave evidence of his full capacity, or even gave any real promise, in his earliest works. They were long mere imitators, without seeming to suspect that they were worth more than their models; and they hardly were aware of their originality before the public discovered it for them. There is something almost depressing in the story of these three theatrical *autodidactes*, but it is very human and very instructive. It shows the will dragging along the intelligence; the investigation by means of experiment preceding science; the effort giving birth to the ability. And even now, they are only half-way along their arduous paths.

So much they have in common. But their temperament and their ideas are dissimilar, and every day adds to this dissimilarity. With whom should one commence? Clearly with him who retains most in him of the past, who adheres still—largely through his antecedents, and partly through his natural disposition—to the school of

Robertson, and to the imitation of the French : with Sydney Grundy.

If I am not mistaken, his first appearance dates from 1872. At long intervals during the subsequent years he succeeded in getting quite small pieces upon the stage, contenting himself very often with provincial theatres. Two things served to draw him forth from obscurity—an affray with the censorship, and the very thorough success of a farce in three acts, entitled *The Snowball*. There was question, in the first case, of an adaptation of *La Petite Marquise*, which he wrote in collaboration with Joseph Mackayers. To my mind, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius contain nothing more frankly moral than *La Petite Marquise*. The story of the piece, for all the licence of its treatment, is one calculated to deter a virtuously inclined woman from succumbing to temptation. Unfortunately its moral is a moral of—shall I say?—fastidious abstention ; a moral it is difficult to appreciate or put into practice, except at an age when passion has lost its fire and its poison.

It serves, therefore, despite its subtle humour and clever observation, no more useful purpose than the entertainment of philosophers. The English censor did not, or would not, see the lesson it taught ; he saw only the posturings and the language, and was alarmed. He had “passed” the *Petite Marquise* in French in all her original licence ; he refused her his sanction when she turned up respectably attired by two of his fellow-

countrymen. Mr. Sydney Grundy made a great outcry, greater, perhaps, than was necessary. He was in the right; but one might have wished that he had kept in the right without so much passion and indignation. However that may be, he made his name known to many people who were destined to keep it in mind.

The Snowball is an English version of *Oscar, ou le mari qui trompe sa femme*. Mr. Sydney Grundy's originality consists in his having introduced into the English farce qualities which were foreign to this species—cleverness and ingenuity, wit, some bits of comedy, and not a single pun. The author holds his puppets adroitly suspended from his finger-tips, without ever entangling their threads. But if, in listening to or reading *The Snowball*, you look out for a single trait of English manners or character, you will do so in vain, for there is not one.

The well-merited success of *The Snowball* retarded Mr. Grundy's dramatic career, because it condemned him to the work of adaptation—so ungrateful in those days—for long years. But this period of ill-fortune had its good side, for he knew how to turn it to account. Just as a good painter, obliged to earn his livelihood by painting portraits, looks on the wealthy Philistines whose features he has to depict as mere models who pay instead of being paid; so Mr. Grundy learned the technique and methods of his business from Sardou, Labiche, and Scribe. I shall not follow in detail these literary jobs of his, some of which

were very humble, though none of them useless. I shall draw attention merely to three of these adaptations, in which Mr. Grundy seems to me to have put some of his personal quality, and to have grafted his own talent on the talent of another.

The first in date, *In Honour Bound*, is at once a condensation and a critical commentary on Scribe's piece, *Une Chaîne*. The heroine is a young wife whose husband has neglected her, and who has sought distractions. How far has she gone in her search? We are not told; and it is better that we should not know, for this doubt adds to the interest of a piece which, whilst wearing the outward aspect of comedy, borders throughout upon serious drama, and keeps it always within sight. The young man who has consoled her, or who has come near to consoling her, and has had strength enough to flee to the ends of the earth from his guilty happiness, comes back presently with a new love in his heart, a love that is to be consummated in a happy and brilliant marriage, if the girl's guardian gives his consent. Now—and it is here that Scribe's hand is discovered—this guardian and the husband, whose honour has been threatened or destroyed, are one and the same, the famous barrister, Sir George Carlyon. He it is who bears the burden of the play; and the plot is unrolled in a kind of cross-examination of the guilty youth at his hands, under the guise of a friendly conversation. How

much does Sir George know? And whither is he making? Therein lies the interest. You follow every move in the clever and perilous game played by the husband whose happiness is at stake; and you follow it with the intenser interest that he never for a moment loses his *sang-froid*, his grace, or his wit. At bottom, his policy consists in counting upon the innate generosity of the woman. After devoting a world of skill and patience to the trapping of Lady Carlyon, at last, when he has in his hands the written proof of her guilt, he throws it into the fire, and, instead of listening to the confession which has been offered him, accuses himself.

There results a mutual pardon, discreetly covering over and absolving all the past. Thus finishes this little piece, which runs smilingly, breathlessly, along the edge of a precipice. It is the Drama in essence, cunningly distilled.

A Pair of Spectacles is an imitation (Mr. Grundy modestly calls it a translation) of *Les Petits Oiseaux*, by Labiche and Delacour. The subject is well known. It is the crisis of distrust which every man goes through, sooner or later, who has believed too much in the goodness of mankind. He passes from a blind optimism to a ferocious pessimism, then returns to a more moderate estimate of average human nature—prepared now and again to come across a wretched creature who abuses his charity, and many shallow natures who accept it and forget it. This indulgent theory, this easy-going attitude,

finds expression in a pretty apologue, explanatory of the title chosen by Labiche. The old fellow's future daughter-in-law congratulates him on the good he effects all round him. "You are so good!" she cries; "but people are so ungrateful!" "What does that matter?" she makes answer; "I feed the sparrows every morning that come to my window-sill. They never say 'Thanks.' Often, indeed, one of them, hungrier than the others, pecks at my finger. But that does not stop me from feeding them again next day." At the *dénouement*, he recalls this lesson read to him by the innocent girl, and applies it to his own experience. The pecking is the deception of which he has been the victim; and as for the ingratitude of people, well, there is nothing to be surprised at in that—the sparrows don't say "Thanks!"

It is a symbol, nothing more nor less,—a symbol in a play by Labiche! Labiche poaching upon the fields of him who has written *Solness, the Master-BUILDER*!—*n'est ce pas un comble*! A second symbol is added to the first in order to justify the title which Mr. Grundy has given to the English piece. In his ill-temper over the discovery that human nature is not perfect, Benjamin Goldfinch has broken his spectacles. From this moment he uses those which have been lent to him by his brother Gregory, the misanthrope. At the *dénouement*, his own come back to him from the optician's. He seizes upon them with delight, and there is nothing to prevent

the spectator, should the superstition be to his taste, from believing that all that has happened has resulted from the changing of these pairs of spectacles. The author's idea is obvious to all. Our mind is the prism by which everything is distorted or refracted. So long as we look at things through the glasses of our intellectual vision, it is probable that they will always appear to us as they appeared at first. The pair of spectacles is in us. Experience breaks them, and illusions mend them again.

In France the *Petits Oiseaux* had a provincial success. In Paris the piece produced but little effect when first performed; and when revived at the Comédie Française some years ago, the critics thought it childish.

In London, on the contrary, in the form given to it by Mr. Grundy, it was given a brilliant reception, which was renewed later on its revival, as I myself can bear witness. Whence is this difference? From the superiority of Parisian taste? Such an explanation would be pleasing to our *amour propre*. I shall venture upon another, which will, perhaps, dispense with this one. Namely, that *Les Petits Oiseaux* is a fairy tale, and that Labiche has no gift for fairy tales. His big honest hands—I speak figuratively, never having seen the author of *Perrichan* and *La Grammaire*—were made to seize and keep hold of the comic aspect of realities. But for this gracefully fanciful subject, the touch of a real writer, such as Mr. Grundy, was required, and

this is why I think the copy is better than the original.

The third adaptation which has struck me is that of *Montjoye*. So far back as 1877 Mr. Grundy offered a first version of it, under the title of *Mammon*, to the English public. He must, while profiting by opinions already passed upon it, have made a full and detailed critical study of the piece before he touched it at all. The result of his reflections was the suppression of a valueless character, that of Montjoye's son, and the introduction of an excellent one, that of Parker, the old clerk, whose fidelity and modesty everyone admires, and who, having found out all his employer's secrets, and treasured up in his dogged and unforgiving heart all the grievances he has experienced, follows him step by step, acquires his property bit by bit, and becomes eventually his master's master.

Mammon is certainly a better made piece than *Montjoye*, but this was not enough for Mr. Grundy. More than sixteen years later he took up the same subject again, and subjected it to a new examination, from two points of view. How had the type of the company-promoter been modified in the course of thirty years? In what particulars does the English speculator differ from his French compeer? The scene will be recalled in which Montjoye, the positivist, laughs at the enthusiastic Saladin, his old schoolfellow, who remained poor through having retained his illusions, his belief in mankind. "That is all

rubbish," Montjoye declares, — "*Tout cela, c'est du bleu !*" Whatever is not practical, whatever cannot be expressed clearly in black and white, he calls "Bleu." Poetical illusions, childish preconceptions, romantic superstitions, sickly sensibilities, sonorous and empty sayings—" *Voilà le royaume de bleu !*"

Thus Montjoye, "*ou l'homme fort,*" declaimed, in language which now seems somewhat out of date. For to-day he has changed rôles with Saladin. He is the enthusiast who gains the confidence of the simple and the credulous, he is the *virtuoso* of sickly sensibility—the Paganini of the sonorous and empty sayings; he has found a mine of gold in the *Royaume du Bleu*. His *Tartufferie* is social rather than religious. He is not content to issue shares in the port of Bohemia, and bonds on a railway from Paris to the moon; he is anxious that these magnificent enterprises should serve the interests of humanity. The modern Montjoye rides upon politics and finance, the Bible and Socialism; he succeeds through chauvinism and through philanthropy. Transport him to London, and clothe him in that hypocrisy of which our neighbours have made an art, and you will have Sir Philip Marchant, the hero of *A Bunch of Violets*.

Thus Montjoye, who comes home at seven in the morning after a spree,—like a college boy who has been out of bounds,—and who sacrifices his financial eminence, his reputation, and his peace of mind to an adventuress, escorted and aggravated

by a Palais Royal husband, would never go down in England, and I think the French public of to-day would refuse to stand him.

I had the honour of personal acquaintance with Octave Feuillet. He was a man of delicate, nervous, solitary disposition. He depicted these aspects of the *vie mondaine* and *demi-mondaine* of 1865 from afar and *de chic*. Mr. Grundy eliminated this naïve and old-fashioned Don Juanism of his. In order to bring about the necessary crisis, he has recourse to bigamy. The expedient is not new, and is even somewhat repellent, but I admit that it gives a solidity to the English piece which the French piece lacks.

Philip Marchant has married twice, Montjoye has not married at all. "What would the world say if it knew you had allowed your mistress to invite it to dinners and dances under the guise of being your wife?" The objection is submitted to Montjoye by his unfortunate accomplice, and by the public to the author who is no better able to reply to it than his hero. At all events, Sir Philip Marchant has not been guilty of this blunder. His second marriage is a crime certainly, but it is not a mistake. And then we escape that ultimate conversion, a lamentable concession made by Feuillet to the optimistic playgoers of the fair sex of thirty years ago. Sir Philip swallows his laudanum (or is it strychnine?) without turning a hair—a method of settling one's differences with social morality and the criminal code resorted to, as we know,

in every country, when no other method is available.

On one point Mr. Grundy has shown himself even more fanciful and sentimental than Octave Feuillet. I refer to the little bunch of violets which gives its name to the piece. Sir Philip, the bigamist, the swindler, who has defrauded public societies, defrauded the poor, defrauded even his own wife, refuses to give the little penny button-hole of violets, his daughter's present to him that morning, in exchange for a sum of five thousand pounds—a sum which would enable him to keep up the fight for another twenty-four hours and—who knows?—perhaps escape bankruptcy and suicide. “These violets are not for sale,” he thunders, and the audience is carried away. The men applaud and the women weep. By this single trait the criminal is redeemed and absolved.

Even in his original plays, Mr. Grundy has been haunted by the memory of his French studies, and no one will think of reproaching him for having, now and again, made use of semi-unconscious reminiscences, floating, as it were, between the regions of his imagination and his memory. A more serious cause for complaint is, that having concerned himself for a great portion of his life with the French theatre, he has ended by confounding our dramatic types with characters from real life. At the same time, as he is gifted with a very lively sense of humorous observation, which he has employed in every direction upon things and people, he has managed to produce

some curious mixtures. Sometimes we have Scribe's marionettes moving in an English atmosphere, sometimes we have English characters unfolding themselves through the course of sentimental plots very much like ours. Thus, in *The Glass of Fashion*, we have depicted for us the havoc wrought by society journalism of the worst type. A silly fool who has come in for a fortune has allowed himself to be persuaded into buying a journal of this class. It traduces his best friends, and even his very wife. A little more and he must institute proceedings against it for libelling himself. The whole of this amusing picture of manners, thoroughly racy of the soil, is framed in a melodramatic affair in which women are juggled out of sight, like a thimble-rigger's peas, in accordance with our traditional method. Mr. Grundy pins his faith to Scribe, whom he looks upon with reason as a marvellous stage-carpenter, and he cannot see the need for a divorce between ingenious scenic contrivance and sincerity of dramatic emotion. And indeed, it is not essential that a theatrical piece should be badly constructed that it may contain human feeling and truth to life. But how to get nature and art to combine together in the same work? That is the enigma, and there are many still who have to search for the secret of this mysterious collaboration.

In every play of Mr. Grundy's there is to be found an element which is very old in the initial situation, and also an element which is very new and very personal in the treatment, the working

out,—the individual note, in short, which relieves even the smallest points, and stamps them with a special character that cannot be counterfeited. It is to Mr. Grundy the writer that Mr. Grundy the dramatist owes his greatest success, and it is the writer, too, who has covered the retreat when the dramatist has entered the fray too rashly, and been threatened with disaster.

This gift of writing is not displayed in rhetorical tirades, or in brilliant discourses and philosophisings upon social problems, as with our writers of the Second Empire; it is concentrated chiefly upon quick rejoinders that are rapped out short and sharp. Humour flows in such abundance through Mr. Grundy's theatrical work that it floods even his serious dramas. *A Fool's Paradise*, that sombre story of poisoning, is so saturated with gaiety that one laughs throughout, from start to finish; and the murderess is so conscious of it that she betakes herself considerably behind the scenes to die, in order not to dissipate our good humour by the sight of her agonies. In *The Late Mr. Castello* there is nothing at all of tragedy—nothing but the whims of a pretty woman, whose amusement it is to woo the lovers of all the rest of her sex; thus causing general indignation.

The author's wit follows her with rare agility through these dangerous gymnastics, which the less nimble would attempt at the risk of a broken neck. Coynesses, childishnesses, contrarinesses, moods of jealousy, endearing terms used in

earnest and in jest, outbursts of passion artificial as well as real, shades and half shades and quarter shades of expression, fibs, feint upon feint, nothing disconcerts the writer, nothing finds this light, subtle, railing, emotional tongue at a loss—the tongue which recalls Marivaux sometimes, and sometimes Musset. You can understand, then, why Mr. Grundy's plays are popular with the public, without satisfying the critics. The public is carried away by the charm of his dialogue; the critics stop to discuss the age of his subject and the truth of his thesis.

One of Mr. Grundy's peculiarities — and, together with his fancy and his originality as a writer, it is my chief reason for delighting in him — consists in the strange contrast presented in his theatrical work between the passions called into play and the impression produced. Severe judges accuse him of being over-indulgent to the weaknesses of unlawful love, and perhaps they are right. But of this I am sure, that you go from one of his plays in an excellent frame of mind, with a genuine wish to lead a good life, and to attain happiness through the giving of happiness to others. How does he set about the management of this? He does not set about managing it at all. There is something in the depth of his nature that gushes out in good-will, a source of generous emotions which strengthen and refresh and reanimate us. In place of the thousand little rules and regulations by which conventional and machine-made morality hems us

in, a broader, if less clearly defined, morality is to be found, one which contrives the avoidance of evil, not by the observance of laws, but by the sparing of pain and suffering to our fellows.

In *Sowing the Wind*, Mr. Grundy has pleaded the cause of illegitimate children with a warmth and eloquence Dumas would not have been ashamed to acknowledge. I am told that the third act, when a good actress has taken part in it, has never failed to produce its effect, and I am not surprised. The piece is well conceived and is touching; and there is a suggestion of history in it, tactful and pleasing. You would say it had really been written over sixty years ago, in this England of 1830, in which the scene is laid.

But I shall cite *An Old Jew* as the best example of those plays of his which do not satisfy ordinary morality, and which yet leave a man better and more strong. It is a curious play. It would be easy to point out its faults; it is very difficult to explain its charm. A man who has been deceived by his wife, instead of showing her up, punishing her, driving her from his house, condemns himself to exile, and allows himself to be suspected at once of hardness and infidelity. Why? Because a father can do without his children, a woman cannot. Left all alone, she would lapse into despair or into shame; her children will be her safeguard, her redemption, her virtue. This conduct of Julius Stern is magnanimous; but if he is ready to ignore himself, should he not think rather of his innocent children than of his guilty

wife? Has he not run too great a risk in confiding the education of a pure-minded girl to an adulteress? The dangerous experiment succeeds, and if you ask me why, I can only say, because Mr. Grundy so decided it. Julius has been mistaken only on one point,—on the powers of endurance of a father deprived of his daughter's caresses, and the companionship of his son.

He returns therefore, and draws near to his deserted family; he remains in concealment, but close beside them, ready to guard and help them.

His daughter plays *ingénue* parts in a London theatre, and although the morality of the wings is a little better on the other side of the channel than on ours, the girl is exposed to such proposals as that of a certain Burnside, who asks her calmly and coolly, without any pretence of love or any beating about the bush, to come and live with him. It is time for the father to show himself. But Julius has a method all his own for watching over his daughter. Every evening he goes to see her act, and, the piece over, returns to bed. As for the young man, his dream is of literary glory, and it is now that the second subject is introduced, a satire upon the ways of contemporary English journalism, which is made to go side by side with the domestic drama of the Sterns. How do we find Julius intervening in the interests of his son? First he buys him a rare edition of "The Dramatists of the Sixteenth Century," which he seems to recommend to him as a model (a mistaken and ill-timed recom-

mendation, as I think, for the reasons I have indicated already in a previous chapter). The young man has written a comedy. Without having read it, and, in consequence, without knowing whether he is encouraging a real or only an imagined vocation, Julius buys a theatre in which the piece may be performed, and he buys also two or three newspapers wherewith to secure its success. Here he assumes proportions that are almost fantastic. His sadness, his wandering and mysterious life, his authority of voice and bearing, that fatal gift of his for turning everything he touches into gold, point to some symbolical intention in the author's mind, and to a *third* subject.

It is no longer *A Jew*; it is *The Jew*—the Jew rehabilitated, and becoming now, in his turn, a dispenser of social justice. But how does he set about it, this reformer? By loading rascals with gold. Not a good way, truly, of closing the *marché aux consciences*. And then the whole structure falls to pieces before a very simple reflection. The newspapers that give success are not to be bought. Those that are to be bought don't give success.

I could proceed with these criticisms, but I am almost ashamed really, as it is, of having gone so far, for they make me look ungrateful. If the play be theoretically bad, how is it that we listen to it, moved or amused, without a moment of fatigue? It is a play without love, for one cannot regard the incident of Burnside's

base proposal as a love scene. A whole act passes in the smoking room of a club, in which we do not catch sight of even the shadow of a petticoat. But one would not miss a line of this frank, direct, live dialogue; one is thrilled by certain sentences, strangely deep or bitterly eloquent, as by lightning flashes; one feels that there are real souls behind these unreal incidents. And then,—shall I acknowledge it?—one is keenly interested in the absurd but affecting spectacle of this father, who thirsts for his daughter's forehead, as a lover thirsts for the lips of his mistress. Why should not such love as this have its drama and its romance, as it has its anguishes, its sacrifices, and its joys?

The New Woman, played in the autumn of 1894, gives us the same emotions, without suggesting to the mind the same doubts and objections. It had a well-merited success. It is, of course, open to criticism. It is a wholly modern picture of manners, the *dernier cri* of social satire, serving as a background to the working out of a very old dramatic subject. Does the play bear out the promises of its title? I see in it three episodic types, of which two, at least, are caricatures; an impudent lady-doctor, who takes herself very seriously; a sort of *garçon manqué*, who smokes and wears her hair short; and a sort of half-faded flirt, who is much more taken up with angling for a husband in troubled waters than with the reformation of society.

I see also a married woman, who bores herself

at home, and who tries to appropriate another woman's husband, by collaborating, or pretending to collaborate, with him on a book. But I have no difficulty in recognising in her the everlasting would-be adulteress, of whom our drama has made such abuse. Her case is complicated with literature; she is the old Blue-Stocking darned anew. Thus escapes us once more the New Woman, this obsessing phantom of which everyone speaks and which so few have seen.

The real theme of the play is the folly of a man of the world in marrying a little farmer's daughter, who has been brought up at home in the country. I have said that it is an old subject, but it is well to remark that it is generally approached from another side. The authors of a certain epoch were fond of describing the origin of one of these passions which level the differences of rank and education. They led the hero and heroine up to the point of marriage, but it is the morrow of their marriage, and the day after that still more, that one would like to hear of. This is precisely what Mr. Grundy sets out to show us, but is his representation of it accurate, lifelike, credible?

In reality, were this marriage to come off, it is very likely that the newly-wedded wife, made giddy by the sudden plunge, would surpass in frivolity those who belong to the gay world into which she has been introduced, and who have lived in it. But this idea would be too true and too simple for the theatre. Or else this little

country girl would show herself inferior to the people amongst whom she has to mix, as much by the vulgarity of her ideas as that of her manners. It is not the world who would repulse her, it is she who would be unable to suit herself to the world; whence it would come, that her husband must either cast her off or become a pariah with her. This version, also, would fail to please the pit. Mr. Grundy, therefore, has preferred to devote all his *savoir faire*, his wit and his emotional power, to the task of making us accept, as a compromise between realism and idealism, a solution as pleasing as it is illogical and essentially theatrical. In the second act, Marjery commits blunder upon blunder. Everybody makes fun of her, and her husband declares she is "hopeless." In the third act she is the admired of all, for her eloquence and dignity, her virtue and tact; those who made fun of her have prostrated themselves at her feet. Is it possible that she has learnt all this during the entr'acte, whilst the orchestra got through a waltz? She takes refuge with her father, whose country dialect is just strong enough to raise a smile. She milks the cows and plucks the apples, the only occupations permissible on the stage to a pretty farmer's lass. The youthful husband comes in search of her to this retreat, and obtains her pardon. She will never be a lady, but she will be a "woman" *par excellence*. The public seemed to me to be delighted with this conclusion. An assembly of

two thousand snobs will never stint its applause to an author who chastises snobbery.

To sum up, Mr Sydney Grundy has never yet had the good fortune to utilise all his gifts at once—to put his whole strength into one important work. But he has not said his last word: he may give us to-morrow a vigorous comedy, taken whole and entire from actual life, a drama palpitating with living passion. Has he not everything required for the purpose? Sensibility, humour, individuality, the knowledge of the theatre, and the favour of the public.¹

¹ These lines appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, on September 15, 1895. Less than three months later the Kendals produced, for the first time in the provinces, a new drama by Mr. Grundy, *The Greatest of These*. This play, which was performed later in London, is a work of real value. In it Mr. Grundy has forgotten his French models, and has painted English life and English characters with a freedom, a fidelity, a power, worthy of that Ibsen to whom he will not have it that he owes anything. He has put aside his wit in order to be more moving. There is not a weak spot or a trace of bad taste in the whole piece. The scene which takes up most of the third act is equally beautiful, whether regarded from a psychological, a literary, or a purely dramatic standpoint.

CHAPTER X

Henry Arthur Jones ; his First Works—His Melodramas—*Saints and Sinners*—The Puritans and the Theatre—The Two Deacons ; The Character of Fletcher—*Judah*—*The Crusaders* ; Character of Palsam ; the Conclusion of the Piece—*The Case of Rebellious Susan*—*The Masqueraders*—Return to Melodrama. Theories expounded by Mr. Jones in his book : *The Renaissance of the Drama*.

THE start of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones was not less difficult than that of Mr. Sydney Grundy. He could get only short and light pieces accepted at first. The earliest play of his within the memory of London play-goers was performed at the Court Theatre, and was entitled, *A Clerical Error*. The second was an idyll in two short acts, called *An Old Master*.

The young author found it necessary to seek refuge in provincial theatres. The world remained unwilling to learn his name—a somewhat undistinguished name, and easily forgotten. When, in 1882, Mr. Archer included him in his *Dramatists of To-day*, there were many who asked, “*Who is this Mr. Jones?*”

It was then he worked at melodrama. He served seven years with Laban, and married Leah, upheld by the hope of one day obtaining

Rachel. This was his apprenticeship. As Mr. Grundy had learnt his craft by adapting our French authors, Mr. Jones learnt his by writing great popular dramas. It was in this *genre*, one which gives full scope to the imagination, that he came to know his own individual temperament, and developed those poetical faculties which were to be put to better uses; it was by this unlikely pathway that he found the road to Shakespearian emotions. His qualities and his defects date from this time.

The great success of *The Silver King* set Mr. Jones at liberty. I have neither seen nor read the piece, which has not been printed. It is a good melodrama, I understand. People found in it, together with some new types and *coups de théâtre*, observation, gaiety, a rare freedom of handling, some really moving touches, and, here and there, flashes of imagination and poetry.

Mr. Jones thought he could now take a step further, and please himself, having succeeded in pleasing the public. He wrote *Saints and Sinners*. The little Margate Theatre was the scene of the first performance of the new play in September 1884, this first performance having for object only the perfecting of the actors in their parts, and the testing of the public. The piece passed thence to the Vaudeville, where it held the bills until the middle of the following year, much talked about and applauded.

It marks an important date, not merely in the career of Mr. Jones, but in the history of the

English drama. It denotes the revival of active hostility, in that ancient conflict between the Puritans and the stage, which began in 1580, and will last as long as English literature and English civilisation. This conflict had assumed a sluggish and inactive character in the nineteenth century. Shattered by the scorn of the Puritans, the stage had not dared to raise its arm for a blow. Suddenly it took the offensive, and carried the war into the enemy's camp. *Saints and Sinners* is only the first of a series of dramas and comedies, in which Mr. Jones has fearlessly attacked the hypocrisies of religion, in their most characteristic form. He has let fly some darts, indeed, which have sped even further, and which he has not shot at random. Has he not declared, in his high-spirited and witty preface to *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, that the theatre was perhaps destined to succeed to the tottering pulpit, and to teach morality to the professional moralists?

Already, in 1885, he had claimed energetically for the drama the right to deal with any subject, even with religious subjects. Elsewhere, he declared that the theatre was one of the organs of the national life, and one of its essential organs; that one could no more imagine England without the theatre, than England without the press and the platform.

He seems to say—and this boldness does not displease in a man of talent—"We want liberty. Free our hands; give us permission to produce

masterpieces, and the masterpieces will not be delayed.”

What Mr. Jones satirised in *Saints and Sinners*, was the money-making spirit that went hand in hand with bigotry. This combination is incarnated by Hoggard and Prabble, the two deacons of the dissenting congregation of Steepleford. Hoggard is a business man on a small scale, and in a small town; Prabble is an easy-going grocer. The one is repulsive, the other merely comic; but, at bottom, they represent the same spirit, in different degrees, and after different fashions. Hoggard is fully aware of his rascality, and there is nothing sincere about him except his pride. He is convinced that there is a special moral code for clever men of his own stamp.

Prabble, on the other hand, is of opinion that the minister would be doing no more than his duty were he to denounce from the pulpit the co-operative stores by which his shop is being ruined. “I keep up his chapel. He ought to keep up my custom.” Even in the last scene, in the midst of the tragic emotions of the *dénouement*, when he wishes to express to the minister they have driven away the remorse of his ungrateful congregation, his one fixed idea comes out again. If only Mr. Fletcher could manage, without inconvenience, to slip in a word on Sunday—just one word about the co-operative stores!

Does this grocer, who would prop up his shop against his chapel, reason and act otherwise at

bottom, than did the great king when he allied his throne with the pulpit of Bossuet? In both cases the policy proved successful—at least, for a time.

“You know, my dear Prabble,” Hoggard says to his friend, “it is we who are the greatness of England; it is we who have made her what she is.” And what is so terrible about it is, that he is not wholly wrong. Hoggard and Prabble represent one of the various types of that Puritan democracy, which accomplished great things in former days, but which has learnt nothing for two centuries, except to make money. They belong to what is called the middle class, and the middle class, so different from our *Classe Moyenne*, is regarded with real contempt by superior intelligences. Matthew Arnold congratulated Mr. Jones ten years ago on having given it, in his admirable picture of these two deacons, one of the hardest blows it had yet received. What neither Mr. Arnold nor Mr. Jones took the trouble to point out is, that in ordinary life the minister cannot belong to a different race of men from those who of their own accord have placed him at their head. Like flock, like pastor, and—I shall venture to add—like creed.

In default of prudence, an artistic consideration (which I can understand) would have strongly impelled Mr. Jones to offer us a pastor differing from his flock, as the suave tenderness of the New Testament differs from the harshness of the Old. This minister, who allows himself to be

robbed by a poulterer, and who says such sublime things, has not been taken from real life, but from *The Vicar of Wakefield*,—Goldsmith's irrational, delightful work. At times he rises to the height of Myriel, the bishop in *Les Misérables*, and it is not at these times I like him best. I acknowledge that he has tried my temper by his blindness, that I have been aggravated by his meekness, have lost all patience with his patience. He is very human, very virile, when before his assembled congregation he makes the confession which is so cruel to him, of his daughter's sin, and relinquishes the spiritual functions which have been his livelihood. There is real grandeur in this self-abasement—a dignity full of impressiveness in this confession of shame. The words are at once plain and delicate, they come from the depths of his nature, and go straight to the soul of his hearers. But when he hides his mortal enemy, in order to shield him from the vengeance he has earned, and shares with him his last piece of bread, I feel that he is going too far, and that pity, as sometimes happens, is clashing with justice. Then, when he cries out, “Christians, will you never learn to forgive?”—the words thrill me, and I change my mind again—I tell myself that one must sometimes exaggerate beyond the bounds of reason to bring even a little goodness into the souls of the pitiless.

Mr. Jones's talent achieved a fresh advance in *Judah*, produced on May 21, 1890. There is no longer any trace of melodrama, either in the

situations or in the characters. The nobility of mind, and the need of spontaneous confession, which mark the finest scene in *Saints and Sinners*, are used as motives again in *Judah*, with great power, and form, so to speak, the mainspring of the play. A young girl named Vashti Dethic, has been brought up by her father to the rôle of *clair-voyante* and miracle-worker. Extreme poverty, extreme youth, moral force carried perhaps to the point of terrorising,—she has abundant excuses for adopting this horrible career. Now, her interests, her pride, the enthusiasm of her stupid devotees, constrain her to persevere in an imposture which she loathes.

We pity her, and are grateful to the author for diverting our scorn to the wretched Dethic. We are even willing to believe that a high-strung, nervous girl may imagine herself to be the subject of miraculous influences. When Vashti is subjected to a fast of three weeks, and when, by the merciless vigilance of her watchers, this fast threatens to become too real, the young girl's heroism touches us, in spite of ourselves, as much as though it were devoted to a better cause. We form the absurd wish that her father may succeed in smuggling some food to her—we are all for the miracle against science, for charlatanism against the truth ; which is going as far as can be gone ! Or rather, we have developed an interest in a poor human creature in serious peril, and, without reflecting upon her character, we hope she may escape. How would it be if we were

passionately in love with her? Thus it is with Judah Llewellyn.

These two names are noteworthy ; the author calls our attention by them to the dual origin of his hero, Celtic and Jewish. This mixed ancestry explains, doubtless, both the fanatic and the impulsive side of his nature, and the mastery of the religious instinct in its conflict with the ardours and passions of the imagination. Judah is endowed with a burning eloquence, the secret of which he gives in the simple statement, “I believe what I say.” This faith, which carries away the uncultured, inspires the respect of men of the world. One listens to him without a smile, when he talks of the voices which have called upon him in the night ; some may not believe that the voices did so call upon him, but all believe that he heard them calling. Thus his church becomes too small for the multitudes who come to seek nourishment, or rather intoxication, in his words.

This man has to pass through various phases of mind before our eyes. At first, he loves Vashti with a humble, ecstatic love, in which religious enthusiasm seems to enter more than human passion. In his eyes she is a superior being—privileged, the elect of God. He dares not defile her with a carnal thought ; it is enough for him to kiss the hem of her robe. But it chanced one evening that he is an involuntary witness of the desperate efforts of Vashti’s father to get some food to her during her fast. At

once, almost without transition, by the force of circumstances that permit no time for deliberation, he becomes her accomplice, he saves her by a lie, and a lie which carries the more weight in that his veracity has never been called in question. A vulgar writer would not have failed to show us Judah raising himself to his full height, and invoking curses upon the woman he had protected, and fleeing afterwards to a solitude where he would be tortured by the visions of lost happiness. Mr. Jones has done just the opposite. Judah's first sensation is a burst of wholly human joy. Vashti is not an angel or a saint, but a woman, a frail creature, like to himself, whom he may love without thought of sacrilege! It is not until later that remorse makes itself felt in his soul, and that his conscience, terrible and tempestuous like passion, asserts its rights.

To all appearances Judah and Vashti are triumphant: they are to be united; Lord Asgarby's daughter, the subject of the imposture, is cured because she believes herself cured; the world pays its homage at once to Vashti's miraculous powers, and to the virtue and eloquence of the man she is to marry. What is lacking? Peace of mind, self-respect. In what poignant terms Judah recounts to Vashti his mental agony! With what imagination of poet, or of the lost, does he give voice and form to all the terrors of the Puritan mind,—those terrors which, for some mere trifle, some shadow of a sin, so tortured Bunyan, and prostrated

Cromwell, pallid, gasping, on the bare boards of his chamber! Yet love has not gone from Judah's heart. Better Hell with her than Heaven without!

The champion of science, Dr. Jopp, for his part, has instituted an inquiry into the whole thing; he is inclined to bracket Dethic and his daughter together. Judah becomes aware of what is in preparation, is free to separate his lot from that of Vashti; but he does not do so. Then when Jopp, on the entreaty of his old friend Lord Asgarby, has consented to spare Vashti, it would be easy for Judah to maintain silence, and to accept, together with his wife, the favours with which they are being overwhelmed. But no, he must speak; he must confess himself! The confession issues with the explosive violence born of long compression, in a strange frenzy of humiliation and of repentance, impetuous, vibrating, almost triumphant, like a blare of trumpets. Beyond the awful but not impassable ordeal, the guilty man and woman see the divine horizon of paradise regained.

“You won't? Then hear me, hear me, all of you! I lied! I lied! Take back my false oath; let the truth return to my lips! Let my heart find peace and my eyelids sleep again! You all know me now for what I am; let all who honoured me and followed me know me too. Hide nothing! Let it be blazed about the city. (*Pause. To LORD A.*) Take back your gift. (*Gives deed to LORD A.*) We will take nothing

from you! Nothing! Nothing! (*Goes to VASHTI.*) It's done. (*Takes her hand.*) Our path is straight; now we can walk safely all our lives."

It is the pride of penitence, and this expression of feeling has never been given a prouder tone. In the previous play, *Saints and Sinners*, old Fletcher, on learning of his daughter's shame, had cried out, "How shall I ever hold up my head again?" To hold up his head, that is an Englishman's first need. And when Letty Fletcher had effaced her transgression by dint of heroism and devotion, she said, not, "I have expiated my sin," but, "I have conquered." By such expressions it is that I can see that the artificial psychology of the drama is yielding place to a truer and more real psychology. Hitherto, almost everything that has been written in England, would seem to have had for object, to conceal and not to make clear the English mind. A new generation of writers has come forth, whose work it will be to depict this mind as it really is, and to make its confession with the fierce sincerity of Judah.

The Crusaders, produced on November 2, 1891, is a piece of quite another stamp. It is not the unfolding of a character contending with circumstances: it is a satirical representation of a *côterie*, a group, a social movement. This kind of piece has but a first act, in which the theme is expounded and a brilliant array of characters presented to the audience. The plot of *The*

Crusaders is a mere imbroglio, fastened on somewhat artificially to a satirical and ethical homily; it turns upon an open window and shut door, which endanger the reputation of a young widow. Unfortunately, we do not take much interest in this young widow, or in the two men who love her; one of them is a faded copy of Judah, the other is nothing at all.

But what is a mere accessory in the view of the ordinary playgoer, constitutes the essential part of the play for the critic, for the historian of the drama and of life.

When the time comes for depicting the state of English society during the last years of the nineteenth century, this curious first act of *The Crusaders* will certainly be drawn upon for material. There will be found in it the confusion of elements that stir and mingle, without uniting, in the vague social movement of this period: enthusiasm lacking a clear end in view, devotion lacking a definite object, a pilgrimage which leads no one knows whither, and on which no single pilgrim will reach his destination. It deals with the reformation of London; a programme so vast and complex as to be none at all. This association counts amongst its members a number of pretty women who play at charity; young idlers for whom the reformation of London is merely an opportunity for flirting, just like private theatricals, *tableaux vivants*, and garden parties; pushing women who turn the occasion to their own profit by bringing about relations with this

"dear Duchess of Launceston," and who raise themselves thus in the world, step by step. One of these good ladies, Mrs. Campion Blake, invites an old statesman to dinner, to meet a kind of apostle whom she defines as a "new variety of inspired idiot—something between an angel, a fool, and a poet! And atrociously in earnest! a sort of Shelley from Peckham Rye. He's rather good fun, if you take him in small doses." After dinner, an American lady gymnast will give a performance in the dining-room. "She's adorable. She gives drawing-room gymnastics after dinner. It isn't the least indelicate—after the first shock." Be sure the Minister will accept the invitation. He is quite ready to reform London, provided only that no one calls upon him to alter his own mode of life. He acknowledges that he has no ideals. No ideals! his hearers exclaim horrified. Alas! no; had he not become a member of the House of Commons in his twenty-second year! Which of the two is Mr. Jones turning into ridicule? Idealism, or the House of Commons? Both, I fancy. Why should there not be a double irony for the clever, just as there is a *galimatias double* for the dull?

In this movement there are many who are in earnest. First of all we have the credulous, ingenuous Ingarfield, dragging in his train Una, the petticoated apostle of the prison and the house of ill-fame, the young virgin whose joy it is to attempt the conversion of rogues and prostitutes. But the most real type is that of Palsam.

This individual is wholly repulsive. A voluntary spy, a detective by his own choice, he is the incarnation of that spirit of sneaking, which rages so cruelly in certain sections of English society. Basile, in comparison with him, is a "good sort," an amiable companion. He stoops to expedients to which an *agent de mœurs* would blush to have recourse against an *habitué* of Saint Lazare; and it is against women of the world, too, that he resorts to them! He is so insensible to indignity that a box on the ear has no effect upon him. How do people put up with him? How is it they let him into their houses? In France we would throw him out without troubling about his calumnies, which would be welcomed only by the lowest kind of newspaper; or rather, a complete Palsam, a perfect Palsam could not be found in France. In England he is a reality and a power. But is he so vile as he seems, as at first we are inclined to regard him? No; his conduct seems mean to the utmost degree; but consider, please, two things: first, that he acts thus, quite disinterestedly; secondly, that he deprives himself of those incorrect enjoyments of which he is so bent upon depriving others. Give him the benefit of these two admissions, and, little by little, the man will begin to wear for you a different aspect. The ascetic will rehabilitate the spy, you will be forced to find a kind of heroism in his meanness, and to admire, while you hate, his hideous virtue, which is perhaps one of the hundred ways of doing good to men in their own despite.

Perhaps it was not Mr. Jones's intention to suggest so many reflections by his Palsam, but whether he wishes it or no, his work is thus suggestive, and it is the special note of this very straightforward, very masculine, very generous satire, that it never ridicules the enemy without letting us see the redeeming traits in his character, and the good motives which he might plead in self-defence, thus putting the real man before us whole and entire.

Mr. Jones ridicules the would-be reformers of London, and represents their efforts as resulting in a pitiable fiasco. But he has not contended, of course, that London is all right as it is, and that the bringing of the great city into a state of moral health has ceased to be one of the dark problems which demand, and baffle, the good intentions of honest folk. He himself has indicated a solution, and the true solution; "To reform London, it is necessary, first of all, that each of us should reform himself." Such is the moral of the piece; and this sermon is worth more than many others.

Through alternate successes and failures, Mr. Jones's popularity has gone on increasing during the last four years. *The Tempter*, it is true, gave the public something of a shock. Despite the intelligently devised splendours of the *mise en scène*, and the admirable resources of his own talent, Mr. Tree, who had a special liking for the piece, and was not wholly unconnected, they say, with its conception, did not succeed in bringing

his audience round to his way of thinking. In the *Triumph of the Philistines*, Mr. Jones resumed his campaign against Puritanism, but after a pettier, less vigorous fashion than in his preceding works. The hero and heroine of this comedy were empty, formless shadows, and the public would not have known *à quoi se prendre*, had not the piece been given a fillip quite unexpectedly by the appearance of an inessential character, that of a whimsical little Frenchwoman, acted to perfection by Miss Juliette Nesville. The study is a brilliant one, and at moments really profound. It is the first time, if I mistake not, that an English dramatist, in introducing a Frenchwoman into his work, has turned out anything more than a collection of mere external peculiarities, tricks of facial expression, mistakes in pronunciation and in language, and that he has penetrated into the very soul, or at least into the *état d'âme*, of another nation, differentiating it from his own.

The Case of Rebellious Susan is a very amusing comedy. I know of none with so lively a beginning. In his ironical dedication to Mrs. Grundy, Mr. Jones begs of that good lady to find out a moral in his play. There should be one in it, he tells her—indeed, there should be several; they have but to be looked for.

I don't know what will be the outcome of Mrs. Grundy's researches. I, for my part, have searched also, but from a different standpoint, and have found nothing, unless it be that Susan is Francillon

with certain differences, which transform both the character and the dramatic situation. The idea of revenging herself against an unfaithful husband, by paying him back in his own coin, must have taken shape, one thinks, first of all in the mind of an Englishwoman, for the Englishwoman has in her nature much more of pride than of love. Susan's grief is not a tearful grief. She is violent, bitter, vindictive; she carries through her little exploit with much self-possession and without a sob. How far has her vengeance carried her? Has she been guilty or merely imprudent? No one knows, and, lacking information upon the subject, neither Mrs. Grundy nor I can solve the problem put before us. Her husband has been unfaithful to her, her lover forgets her, and the last crime is worse than the first. She returns, but dispassionately, to the domestic hearth. Oh! cries the repentant husband, how I am going to love you! Yes, love me, she replies; I need to be loved. But to judge by his hungry glances at her whilst he helps her off with her opera-cloak, I am afraid we are witnesses of a fresh misunderstanding. The love that she is offered and the love she wants are not the same love. An omen full of menace for the future. It is to the President of the Divorce Court, I fear, that it will fall in the end to lay down the moral of the whole business.

Very different is the heroine of *The Masqueraders*, who, as impersonated by Mrs. Patrick Campbell, fascinated London during the season

of 1894. Dulcie Larondie is a coquette, at first ambitious, giddy, keen on enjoyment, anxious to shine; become a mother, she adores her child; then love takes possession of her; and then duty reasserts its claims. She is the plaything of her own feelings, and of the passions she raises up all round her. She obeys every voice that calls to her, abandons herself with a kind of gracious pitiful passiveness to these unknown forces and these mysterious fatalities, within her and without, which break her strength and oppress her will.

Mr. Jones had taken leave of melodrama in order to write *Judah*; he returned to it in *The Masqueraders*, not from listlessness or unwittingly, but deliberately and systematically. A husband staking his wife at a game of *écarté*—is not this melodrama? But what cares the author of *The Masqueraders*, whether the incidents be improbable and his situations artificial? Mr. Jones will not hear of the “well-made” piece; he seems to have recognised that the architecture of a play does not count for much, and that the science of Scribe and Sardou is a snare. Nor will he hear of realism or of logic. He defends himself against the charge of being a realist as though it were a disgrace, and ridicules those who pay for admission to a theatre to see paper lamp-posts and canvas houses, when they can see real lamp-posts and real houses in the streets for nothing. Realism, he contends, is only a vast field of preliminary studies and a store-room of materials. As for logic, it

may be left to the professors who teach it, and thus make a comfortable living. Why should the drama be logical when life is not? A drama should contain four principal elements, amongst which neither logic nor realism finds a place; and these elements are—Beauty, Mystery, Passion, and Imagination. The drama, he is convinced, is returning now to the mysterious and imaginative side of human life.

And if the critic press too hard upon the author of *The Masqueraders*, he has recourse for his defence—and quite rightly—to the great name which is worth ten thousand arguments. For it must be again asserted, Shakespeare's plays, with the exception of four or five, are melodramas, traversed and fertilised by streams of poetry, lit up by flashes of thought, and here and there softened, brightened, animated, by some passing glimpses of real life.

To the lessons of Shakespeare, Mr. Jones has added those of Ibsen. They are great masters, but there comes a time of life when no one can have any master, save himself. I do not know whether the theories developed of late by Mr. Jones will lead him on to works which shall throw *Judah* and *The Crusaders* in the shade. But he is certainly passing through a crisis in his career, and I cannot refrain from remarking that the structure of his later plays has been less solid, and that their meaning has been apt to be obscure and vexing to the mind. Whether or no he issue from behind this cloud, he has already

played a great part in the resuscitation of the drama, and he is the most English of all the living English dramatists ; the one who expresses most sincerely and most brilliantly the mind of his generation and of his race.

CHAPTER XI

Two Portraits—Mr. Pinero's Career as an Actor—His Early Works—*The Squire, Lords and Commons*—The Pieces which followed, half Comedy, half Farce—*The Profligate*; its Success and Defects—*Lady Bountiful*—*The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*—Character of Paula—Mrs. Patrick Campbell—*The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*.

MEANWHILE, it was to Mr. Pinero that fell the lot of writing the most human work yet known to modern English dramatic literature, — the work, too, approaching most nearly to perfection.

I have never gazed on Mr. Pinero in the flesh, but I have seen two portraits of him which have struck me. In one I seem to discover the pensive *bonhomie* of a philosopher, who looks on at the world from afar; the other suggests rather the frequenter of drawing-rooms—the look in the eyes is more alive, the smile more knowing, less calculated to leave one at one's ease. Which of these portraits tells the truth? Both of them perhaps. There are aspects of Mr. Pinero's work which respond to these different moods of a single mind. Then, the two physiognomies, which I try to reconcile with each other, have this trait in common: they both show us a man who observes and who reflects.

And, in truth, a man must look about him and within him a good deal in order to be able to pass, like Mr. Pinero, from the formless efforts of his youth, or even from such pieces as *The Squire* and *Lord and Commons*, to a work like *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. His career as an author has been a long-continued ascent, delayed by many incidents and accidents, but from which the horizon of art has seemed larger at every stage. To-day he is in the heights, almost at the summit.

In his early youth he had felt his vocation and had written a play, but he knew nothing of the theatre. He learnt his art, as Dion Boucicault and H. J. Byron and Tom Robertson before him, by acting in the plays of others.¹ He maintained a good position upon the Edinburgh stage, and then came to London, where he became connected first with Irving's company and then with the Bancrofts'.

After getting some small pieces produced, he tried his hand at the kind of plays then in vogue, —farces, melodramas, and sentimental comedies. He adapted some French pieces also ; and it was then he realised what was lacking in his first models, in Robertson and his emulators. A play is a living organism. Under the flesh one should find organs, muscles, an articulated skele-

¹ His début was in 1874, when he was nineteen. He has given an account of some of his Edinburgh experiences about this time in a pleasant Preface to Mr. William Archer's *Theatrical World in 1895*.

ton. It was this frame-work that Mr. Pinero wished to give to his dramatic works ; and his ambition did not, perhaps, aspire beyond sustaining Robertson by means of Scribe. What he himself possessed, and what was already recognised in his work, was a gift for the writing of bright and natural dialogues, free from those tricks and artificialities which until then had served as wit upon the stage. This dialogue was the language really called for by the plot ; but it was the plot, precisely, that was weak in Mr. Pinero's earliest efforts.

The Squire was an unlikeliest story of a case of bigamy, annulled by an unexpected death. The piece pleased, by reason of its idealised representation of rural life. There was a breath of the woods in it, and a smell of hay. But even this attraction the author had borrowed from a pretty novel, by Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

Lords and Commons carries a degree further the romantic strangeness of the Swedish drama, by which it is inspired. A great nobleman has married a young girl of illegitimate birth, in ignorance of her history. He discovers the fact, and drives her ignominiously from the house. After some years, she comes across his path again, without his recognising her. She has a double end in view—to win back her husband's love in her new guise, and to awaken his remorse in regard to *that other*, thus torturing him with conflicting emotions. Finally, she sends him, his

heart torn in twain, to a *rendez-vous* with his former victim to obtain her pardon. When Mr. Pinero was content to write a *dénouement* of this kind, who could have divined in him the future creator of *Mrs. Tanqueray*?

But at this very moment he had discovered another vein, which he worked for a number of years with increasing success. This was a kind of hybrid production, which partook of farce in regard to plot, and of the comedy of manners in regard to ideas and to dialogue. In short, it belonged to the same province of the drama as *Divorçons*, sometimes on a higher plane, sometimes on a lower. You would say that characters from Dumas and D'Augier had fallen by accident into a scenario of Labiche. *The Magistrate* is thoroughly French in character. A London Magistrate, who finds it necessary to hide himself under a table in a restaurant of doubtful reputation, and who, under this table, knocks up against his own wife, and who, in the following act, having escaped by a miracle from this fearsome situation, finds himself called upon to pronounce judgment upon this guilty spouse of his (who, needless to say, is guilty only in appearance),—this kind of thing does not belong to English life or even to English humour. In *Dandy Dick* and in *The Hobby-Horse*, I find, in the midst of fanciful incidents, a number of delicate and noteworthy sketches of provincial life, of clerical society, of the racing world, and those who belong to it, including a queer kind of female centaur,—

a woman jockey,—whom Mr. Pinero has certainly not borrowed from our *répertoire*. There are many brilliant features really; much ingenuity of invention, as well as a real sense of fun and fertility of resource in *The Times* and *The Cabinet Minister*. I have read these two pieces a number of times, and found them amusing in their deliberate exaggeration. But when I look into them closely, I ask myself whether the phase of social evolution through which we are passing is really like that which the author holds up to ridicule, and whether his caricatures are not a generation or two behind the time. And it is always thus. In the matter of satire, it is the newspaper always that opens the way; the novel comes after it, and then, after a long interval, the theatre. The manners it describes have often ceased to exist; the types it portrays have disappeared, or have become changed. We laugh over Egerton Bompas, the rich shopkeeper, who wants to marry his daughter to a peer of the realm; and over Joseph Lebanon, the vulgar little stockbroker, who dreams of getting invited, through the influence of his sister, the fashionable modiste, to a shooting-party at a castle in the Highlands. But we know quite well that nowadays it is the other way about. It is the peers of the realm who seek to ally themselves with Bompas; and, instead of trembling before them in Parliament, he imposes his social and political programme upon them, turning against land, which is in extremity already, the storm

which has been threatening capital. Mr. Joseph Lebanon's part is not to accept invitations, but to give them. It is he who gives shooting-parties, and invites the peers; he allows his house to be used for aristocratic dances, and if he does not appear at them himself, it is from disdain, not from discretion. If he be distinguishable from his new companions, it is through his carefulness in aspirating his h's, his punctiliousness in the matter of etiquette, of his dress, of his servants' livery, of his stud, and of his table. And then if he does make solecisms, they are thought delightful. The only failing for which he could not be forgiven would be—failure. And he is on his guard.

I am afraid, therefore, that Mr. Pinero's comedies, although very pleasant, are already somewhat aged at their birth. It is in vain to get them up in the latest fashions; their age is evident, especially when they are looked at side by side with that first act of *The Crusaders*, in which the satire is so modern and so full of life.

Mr. Pinero had not renounced the serious drama, and all his theatrical friends, watching his progress in light comedy, yet expected to see him in this field in which, so far, he had achieved but half-successes. On April 24, 1889, the Garrick opened its doors with a drama of his, entitled *The Profligate*. Marvels were expected from the new theatre which John Hare had erected for himself and his company. As had been the case with the opening of the Prince of Wales's, it was

felt that the first night at the Garrick ought to mark a date in the history of the drama. The critics, "old" and "new," were enthusiastic. "At last," exclaimed Mr. Archer, "we have a real play; a play which has faults, with a third act which has none!" Those triumphant assertions, made in the heat of the moment, must unfortunately be taken with a considerable discount. *The Profligate* is a melodrama, treated with delicacy and distinction, but incontestably a melodrama in every aspect and in every part, that wonderful third act included; it is even one of the most fanciful, most romantic melodramas that have been written in England for fifteen years.

Whom shall I recognise as an English character, or even as a human type? Hugh Murray, the sentimental lawyer, who loses his heart at first sight to a schoolgirl, and who buries this beautiful passion in the depths of his heart, to disinter it just at the wrong moment? Janet?—who has given herself, without the temptation of love, to a seducer in the forties, and who, during the remainder of the piece perseveres in the accomplishment of acts of delicacy, of renunciation and of self-abnegation without number, veritable *tours de force—morale*. Leslie?—the heroine of the play, a schoolgirl who giddily exclaims, a quarter of an hour before her wedding, that she wonders whether the world will seem of the same colour when she is the wife of Duncan Renshaw; and who, after a month spent *tête-à-tête* with her

husband in a villa near Florence, where a fresco of Michael Angelo is to be seen, seems to know life better than we do ourselves. I know, of course, the explanation that is forthcoming : only a single moment was required to alter this character, to bring light to that one. It is precisely in this explanation that I find the mark of melodrama. In serious psychology, it is not so easy to believe in these “moments”—in these sudden revelations, these flash-like crises, which transform an individuality completely, annulling nature and education.

And what is one to say of the “Profligate” himself? He is just the traditional libertine of all the innumerable English novels published during the last fifty years, nor is he unknown to our own old Boulevard du Crime. We see him coldly and deliberately cynical up to the moment when love touches him with its magic ring. That is a kind of conception that has passed its prime. Nowadays we are inclined to regard Don Juan as a kind of dupe, the plaything of woman from puberty to decrepitude. We picture him to ourselves more engaging when he first begins to sin, and less easy to convert when he has become hardened to it. We find it difficult to believe that thirty days of wedded bliss suffice to awake a conscience which has lain dormant for forty years. If the sense of morality were innate, it must have shown itself earlier ; to have been acquired and to have reached such a degree of perfection and sensitiveness, it would

have needed more time than the average duration of a honeymoon.

The situation which delighted so the English critics may be thus described. The seducer's wife has, without knowing it, given shelter to his victim. She wishes to help her to confront the man who has wronged her, and her heart breaks when she sees upon whom the penalty has to fall. I admit that the scenes leading up to this discovery, contrived with great ability, produce a veritable anguish in the spectator's mind, and that the scene between the husband and the wife, which follows after it, is on the same plane of emotion. But by what a number of improbable coincidences had this precious moment to be bought! Chance had to take Janet to Paddington station at the same moment as Leslie and her brother; Chance had to give this same Janet as "companion" to Miss Stonehay, Leslie's school friend; to send the Stonehays travelling towards the environs of Florence and the villa of the Renshaws; to synchronise Janet's illness and Dunstan's departure so that the two women may interest themselves in each other. And it is Chance again that makes Janet see Dunstan in Lord Dangars' company in order that the confusion may arise regarding the two men, and that this Lord Dangars, who is Dunstan's friend, may become engaged to Irene Stonehay, the friend of Leslie. And even after Chance has made all these thoughtful arrangements, Renshaw's happiness might yet be saved, and this

terrible danger by which it is threatened be avoided (and this great scene of Mr. Pinero's never come to pass), if only Janet were allowed to go as she desires, and as good sense and modesty make it right that she should. What is it that makes her stay? Who is it that advises her to bring about this scandal? No one but Leslie, and I cannot but think her ideas on the subject singularly gross for so refined a person. This advice she gives is grounded on the slenderest and most irrational of arguments; a score of conclusive replies could be given to the pitiful considerations she puts forward. But Janet has to be convinced. Otherwise, what would become of the crisis of this "Faultless Third Act"?

What surprises me most of all is the number of useless excrescences with which the author has encumbered his piece. What is the point of this solicitor who bores us, and who gives himself such important airs throughout the play without having the slightest influence upon the development of the plot? When, by a final stroke of chance, Leslie has come to know of the absurd love of which he is the victim, why should she let him see that she has heard? All she can find to say to him is, "Good-night." And "Good-night" is all he has to say in reply. This scene in four words could only be sublime or grotesque: I am inclined towards the latter view of it.

Had I been present at one of the first performances of *The Profligate*, I should have imagined

myself in the presence of a talent that had lost its way, turning its back on the goal to which it should direct its steps, seeking beyond the confines of reality for some imaginative source of tears. I should have been wrong. Mr. Pinero is of a reflective turn of mind; he learns from his mistakes, and is not blinded by his successes. Before the echoes of the applause which greeted *The Profligate* in London had yet died out in the provinces and abroad, Mr. Pinero was at work upon another drama, conceived after a fashion quite different—quite contrary, in fact—a drama in half tints, with realistic touches; a sort of novel in dialogue. This was *Lady Bountiful*, produced on March 7, 1891.

In *Lady Bountiful* there is no question of any great fundamental truth, no great human interest. It is a very unequal piece of work, in turn very moving and very irritating, for of the two women in whom its interest centres, it happens unfortunately that one has the sympathy of the author and the other that of the public. But it showed, at least, that its author had found its way into the domain of psychological observation.

It was on May 27, 1893, that *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was performed for the first time at the St. James's Theatre. It must be said, to the credit of the public, that its success was immediate, universal, and continued. The critic whom I have quoted so often exclaimed in a burst of joy, that here was a piece "which Dumas might sign without a blush." No one is entitled to speak in

the name of our greatest dramatist ; but quite recently, when I re-read *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, I said to myself that if the greatest gift of M. Alexandre Dumas was that of embodying deep psychological and social observation in splendid eloquence or dazzling wit, this rare faculty is to be found almost in an equal degree in Pinero's masterpiece.

“The limitations of *Mrs. Tanqueray*,” Mr. Archer goes on to say, “are really the limitations of the dramatic form.” I would go further still, and say that such a piece enlarges the province of the theatre. Minute details are to be found in it, brought out by intelligent and carefully thought-out acting, which one would have regarded as too small to attract attention on the stage, shades that the theatre had left to the novel up till then. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is, like *Lady Bountiful*, an acted novel, but a novel excellently constructed. Its four acts are its four chief chapters, and it should be noticed that the first two of these chapters are purely analytical ; but emotion is introduced imperceptibly into the play, and we step from psychology into drama without being conscious of the passage.

It is not the old, old subject of the courtesan in love, but that of the mistress raised to the dignity of wife. One of Mr. Pinero's clever notions is that of having in a sense left passion out of the question. It is clear, of course, that Tanqueray is very sensible of Paula's personal attractions. Who would not be, in the presence of so charming

a woman? But there is another feeling mingled with this. He is neither a satyr nor a stoic, he assures his friend Cayley; he has a quite rational affection for "Mrs. Jarman"; hitherto she has never met a man who has been good to her; he, Tanqueray, will be good to her, that is all. Is he absolutely sincere? Is his affection quite so rational as he asserts? Cayley has his own ideas upon the subject, and so have we. Mr. Pinero has been charged with not having told us to what extent philanthropy—the craze for redeeming—entered into Tanqueray's marriage, to what extent the desire to have a pretty woman all to himself. But after all, was it incumbent on the author to give us Tanqueray's psychology? Was it not rather an indication of his æsthetic sense to keep the husband in the background, to leave him in half-tints so as not to mar the effect of the principal figure? That excellent actor, Mr. Alexander, seems to have felt this, for he effaced himself in the presence of Mrs. Campbell, though quite capable of filling the stage unassisted, as he showed in *The Masqueraders* and many other pieces. In regard to Tanqueray's character, this, however, should be noted, that, being rich and young enough to keep a mistress without looking ridiculous, he might, if he chose, have become Paula's lover. If he decided to make her his wife, it was first of all to give her pleasure, but also to satisfy a sense of devotion and of virtue in himself. This I believe to be quite true to life. He was born to believe in women—not to be

deceived by them, but to deceive himself in their regard: which is a different thing, and perhaps more serious. His first wife was like a nun. He ends with a courtesan. The law of moral oscillation requires that he should go from the iceberg (it is thus the first Mrs. Tanqueray is described to us) to a volcano. Like all weak men, he would play the part of *un homme fort*. With Paula's arm passed through his, he is ready to look the world in the face; but when on the eve of their wedding she comes to see him at eleven o'clock at night, his first remark is, "What will your coachman say?" This remark lights up his whole character, and for my part I require nothing more.

But Paula! What a complex character is hers, and how true in all its aspects! How important to the delineation of this character, and how suggestive, is everything she says—even her most trifling remarks; with what tact and cleverness are her very silences contrived! And with what an infinity of deft and delicate touches has the masterpiece been brought to perfection! She is a courtesan, but with an elegance of manners which imparts to her an air of poetry, and which makes her more akin to a Gladys Harvey than to a Marguerite Gautier. There are women who traverse muddy ways with so light a step that they do not sink in them, and that one but guesses where they have passed from little stains upon the tips of their shoes. One or two traits reveal to us the irregularity of Paula's life; the mobility

of her impressions, the manner at once fanciful and passive in which she allows chance to regulate her actions. She has forgotten to order her dinner ; her cook, a "beast" who "detests" her, has pretended to believe that she was not dining at home, and has given himself an evening out. So she has got herself up in *grande toilette* and has taken up her position in her dining-room, her feet on the fender. Here she has fallen asleep and dreamt. She tells us her dream later, the while she sups off the dessert of the farewell dinner Tanqueray had given to three old bachelor friends. To sup instead of dining, does not this in itself suggest a whole conception of life? Whoever gets into the way of it will never be able to reconcile himself to the respectable regularity of the family joint.

Thus it is with her in everything. She has acquired a certain *ton*, now brusque, now bewitching, an air of Bohemianism, and a whole host of opinions which could never tally with the rôle of married woman ; and these characteristics have become embedded in her nature. Her irregularity of word and deed goes with a like incoherence of thought and feeling. Sombre moods succeed suddenly to extreme gaiety and vanish as suddenly again. The idea of suicide comes to her ; next moment she bursts into laughter at the sight of the mournful expression she has evoked on Aubrey's countenance. She has so serious a way of saying the wildest things, and says the most serious things so frivolously, that you don't know

what to believe ; her every word leaves you under her spell, and this effect is intensified more and more. She is a really “good” woman, Tanqueray will declare just now to his friend. It is neither an illusion on his part nor even an exaggeration. Paula is “good” and loyal; she has kept back from Aubrey nothing of her past. Better still, she has spent this last day writing out a general confession, with a precision and scrupulousness in which there is a touch of childishness, a touch of cynicism, and a touch, I think, of heroism. She weighs the letter with a smile. It is heavy! She wonders if the post would take all that for a penny! She says to Aubrey, quite simply, without affectation of any kind, without any airs of tragedy about her, that she wants him to read this letter and to think over it; and then, on the morrow, at the last moment, if he changes his mind, let him send her a line before eleven o’clock, and—“I—I’ll take the blow!” Aubrey puts the letter into the fire and she throws her arms round his neck; she tells him quite frankly she had counted upon his doing so, an admission which would quite spoil her “effect,” had she sought one.

Has the question ever been better set? Think of the *Mariage d’Olympe*. The insolent and hypocritical *gueuse* stood revealed before she had uttered half a dozen words. We knew she could never become acclimatised to that family of honest folk, amongst whom fortune had thrown

her. Where, then, was the problem? All Augier's wonderful cleverness hardly sufficed to make us await during two hours the punishment of the wretched woman. Paula is sincere; she is a woman of heart and brain; she is as good as the women of that world in which she hopes to take her place. In the absence of a *grande passion*, she feels a grateful tenderness for the gallant fellow who would lift her up; she is fully resolved to be faithful to him and to make him happy. We desire ardently her success. Why should she not succeed?

We learn in the second act. First of all, because, once she is married, Paula gets bored. The world will not visit her, and custom does not permit of her taking the initiative. She is a kind of prisoner in the beautiful country-house in Surrey. The monotonous tranquillity of "home" oppresses her after the feverish, exciting existence she has led; the quiet wearies her to death. Here is her account of her day's occupations from hour to hour.

"In the morning, a drive down to the village, with the groom, to give my orders to the tradespeople. At lunch, you and Ellean. In the afternoon, a novel, the newspapers; if fine, another drive—if fine! Tea—you and Ellean. Then two hours of dusk; then dinner—you and Ellean. Then a game of Bésique, you and I, while Ellean reads a religious book in a dull corner. Then a yawn from me, another from you, a sigh from Ellean, three figures suddenly rise—'Good-

night! good-night! good-night!' (*Imitating a kiss.*) 'God bless you!' Ah!"

With Cayley she speaks out more strongly. He asks her how she is.

Paula (walking away to the window): "Oh, a dog's life, my dear Cayley, mine."

Drummle: "Eh?"

Paula: "Doesn't that define a happy marriage? I'm sleek, well-kept, well-fed, never without a bone to gnaw and fresh straw to lie upon. (*Gazing out of the window.*) Oh, dear me!"

Drummle: "H'm, well, I heartily congratulate you on your kennel. The view from the terrace is superb."

Paula: "Yes, I can see London."

Drummle: London! Not quite so far, surely?"

Paula: "I can. Also the Mediterranean on a fine day. I wonder what Algiers looks like this morning from the sea? (*Impulsively*) Oh, Cayley! do you remember those jolly times on board Peter Jarman's yacht, when we lay off"—(*Stopping suddenly, seeing Drummle staring at her.*)

Has she ceased to love her husband and to appreciate the sacrifice he has made for her? By no means. When he asks her tenderly what he can do for her, she tells him he can do nothing more. He has done all he could do. He has married her. She accuses herself. Fool that she was, why did she ever want to be married? Because the other women of her world were *not*. The title of married woman looked so fine, seen

from afar. Instead of trying to make her way into a circle of people who would have nothing to say to her, why not have lived happily with Aubrey in her own sphere, in which she would have experienced neither the cold insolences of well-bred people nor the inexorable uniformity of well-to-do, respectable life?

But these are Paula's least serious trials. There is another woman in the house — the daughter by the first marriage. She has shut herself up in a convent, but just when her father is marrying again she decides to resume her place in his household. This young girl inspires in Paula a double jealousy. Paula envies her the tenderness shown her by Tanqueray; she feels that this tenderness is very different from the love she herself inspires. Then she would fain win the love of this child, who, warned by some instinct, draws away from her and shrinks from her caresses. It is a shame, she cries, for after all the girl knows nothing—she ought to love her. Then, forgetting that love does not come to order, that advice cannot produce it, that it is begged for in vain, she exclaims to Tanqueray, that he should command Ellean to love her. This love would do her so much good. It would expel from her nature that mischievous feeling which carries her into deeds of rashness and folly.

A neighbour, a lady who has for long been a family friend of the Tanquerays, comes to call on her at last, but it is only to take her step-

daughter to some extent from under her care. What is it intended to do? To find some distractions for Ellean and get her married if possible (it being obvious that Paula cannot take her into society), and thus to bring about a freer and quieter time for Paula and her husband. But Paula can see in all this nothing but a conspiracy formed behind her back, and in which her husband is mixed up. Then ensues a passionate scene in which bursts out all the terrible violence of this spoilt-child-like character, embittered by a false position. Now there remains nothing more for us to learn about her.

When we see Ellean again in the third act, a great change has come over her. On her travels she has come across a man whom she loves and who wants her to marry him. Paula is overwhelmed with delight. She sees an opportunity of playing the part of a mother. She will help on this love-affair, and Ellean will love her out of gratitude. Already the ice in which the young girl's heart has been locked is beginning to melt. She is to be found acknowledging to Paula the feeling of repulsion she at first had entertained for her, and trying to explain away, and express her sorrow for, her conduct. But the man who has gained the love of the girl is one of the former lovers of the woman!

This is the situation which forms the subject of the last two acts, and which leads Paula in the end to suicide. The circumstance which brings her face to face with a man whom she had known

before her marriage is likely enough ; that which makes of him a suitor for the hand of Ellean is less natural, but not impossible, and it would be ungracious—after the author has so richly catered for our psychological curiosity by his rare gifts of analysis—to carp at the means he has employed of stirring our sensibility. He has made it clear to us from out the close of the second act that the domestication of the courtesan is an impossible dream ; and the appearance of Captain Ardale, bringing things to a crisis, does but render the antagonism between Past and Present, visible, palpable, crushing. And the Future, what of it? We are to be shown it ; for nothing has been overlooked by the stern logic which informs this play, underlying and disguising itself, but not altogether hidden, under the aspect of humour and emotion. Paula, her mind already full of those thoughts of death she had, as it were, flirted with in the first act, replies to her husband, who has suggested as a remedy their migration to some distant land :—She sees her beauty, she tells him, fading little by little, her beauty that was her one strength, her one unfailing excuse ; she sees herself *tête-à-tête* with this cruel and insoluble problem, with the bitter memory of her misdeeds, with the consciousness of the harm she had suffered and had wrought. . . . I shall never forget this scene. How her hoarse voice vibrated, and its accents of despair! How her every word went to the heart and sank in it! The actress had her

share in this great triumph, and it was one of the strokes of luck attending this fortunate play that it was the means of revealing a great artist.

Mrs. Patrick Campbell is a woman of Society who was led by circumstances and an unusually strong vocation to embrace the stage. She is said to have Italian blood in her veins ; hence, no doubt, that nervous delicacy of hers, that *morbidezza* which shades, veils, tempers, refines her talent no less than her beauty. She has neither the originality, nor the knowledge, nor the voice of Sarah Bernhardt, but she possesses that magnetic personality of which I have spoken with reference to Irving, and with which there is no such thing as a bad part. If this personality must be described, I would say that Mrs. Campbell's province as an actress is more particularly that of dangerous love. That voice of hers, though it has but little sonorousness, power, or richness, produces in one a sense of disquiet and distress, straitens the heart with a kind of fascinating delicious fear that I would describe as the *curiosité de souffrir*. You feel that if you love her you are lost, but once you have seen her it is too late to attempt resistance. The generations which believed in the human will, which asked for simple tenderness, pert coquetry or imperious passion in a heroine, would never have understood her. She has come just in time to lull our dolorous philosophy, to show incarnate in woman the victim and the instrument of destiny.

It was with the same ally that Mr. Pinero risked his next battle, in January 1895, at the Garrick. I shall not analyse *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*. I acknowledge that the piece is full of charming traits, and that the melodramatic element has been carefully eliminated from it. But I am obliged also to say that the author has seized one of the serious questions of the time, the emancipation of woman, and her revolt, justified in some respects, against marriage, and that this great subject has been allowed to slip through his fingers. Agnes Ebbsmith is on the point of seeking consolation in free love for the troubles and humiliations of her married life. She has rejected a copy of the Bible which a friend has offered as a last resource. She has thrown it into the fire, then in a sudden reaction she rushes to the fireplace, plunges her arm into the flame, rescues the sacred book, and falls upon her knees. The scene is a very fine one, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell never failed in it to bring down the house. But the conversion of Agnes is a *dénouement*,—not a solution, unless Mr. Pinero would have us believe that the modern woman will find in the Bible a response to all her anxieties, a remedy to all her ills. It is a delicate thesis, and not wishing to discuss it I shall remain silent. I prefer to bring my account of his talent to a stop, provisionally, with this admirable *Mrs. Tanqueray*, which submits and solves a moral problem at the same time that it sets forth and brings to its natural close a drama of domestic life.

CHAPTER XII

Ibsen made known to the English Public by Mr. Edmund Gosse—
The First Translations—Ibsen acted in London—The Performers and the Public—Encounters between the Critics—
Mr. Archer once more—Affinity between the Norwegian Character and the English—Ibsen's Realism suited to English Taste ; his Characters adaptable to English Life—The Women in his Plays—Ibsen and Mr. Jones—Present and Future Influence of Ibsen—Objections and Obstacles.

“THERE is is now living at Munich a middle-aged Norwegian gentleman, who walks in and out among the inhabitants of that gay city, observing all things, observed of few, retired, contemplative, unaggressive. Occasionally he sends a roll of MS. off to Copenhagen, and the Danish papers announce that a new poem of Ibsen's is about to appear.”

It was by these characteristic lines that England learnt of the existence of the singular man who exerts to-day so great an influence over the art and the thought and the moral life of the whole of Europe. He was shut up at that time in his meagre Dano-Norwegian glory, like that genie whom the Eastern tale shows us imprisoned in a bottle. As for the author of the article which brought him before the English public, he was a

quite young man, a subtle poet and delicate critic, Mr. Edmund Gosse. Nowadays he occupies in the literary world one of the foremost places amongst those who create and who criticise, but the best pieces of good fortune fall to one's youth. In his distinguished career as a critic, he has had no more precious stroke of luck than that of the finding of Ibsen, at an age at which as a rule one has been hardly able to find oneself.

Mr. Gosse made known Ibsen's published works, his historical and historico-legendary dramas, his first efforts towards taking up his position in the domain of modern realism. He showed an indulgent partiality towards *The Comedy of Love*, and justified it by ingenious translations into verse of his own. He condemned *Emperor and Galilean* as only a half-success, although his faithful and penetrating analysis of it did no wrong to any of the beauties of the piece. He rendered full justice to the sombre grandeur of *Brand* and the dazzling fancy of *Peer Gynt*. In short, he heralded a poet and a satirist. Ibsen has long ago renounced the first of these titles, and as for the second, Mr. Gosse must find him somewhat *grêle* for the part. He could not, in 1873, foresee the realistic dramatist, the reformer, the psychologist, and the symbolist, who in turn have appeared before us. But he touched the right note, I think, when he paid his homage to Ibsen as "a vast and sinister genius"—"a soul full of doubt and sorrow and unfulfilled desire."

Ibsen entered into correspondence with his

young critic, as Goethe before him had done under analogous circumstances with Carlyle. Mr. Gosse was one of the first to be informed of the internal crisis which was transforming the poet's talent, and which was to be a starting-point for the series of social and psychological dramas. "The play upon which I am now at work, he wrote,"—it was *The Pillars of Society*,—"will give the spectator exactly the same impression as he would have watching events of real life running their course before his eyes." The stage was to be merely a room, one of whose walls had been taken down that two thousand people might look on at what was happening inside it. Mr. Gosse entreated the author of *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* not to abandon poetry, but Ibsen followed his destiny.

In England they began now to translate him. In 1876 Miss K. Ray gave an English version of *Emperor and Galilean*; three years later the British Scandinavian Society printed at Gloucester a selection of extracts from his works. In 1882 Miss H. F. Lord translated *The Dolls' House* under the title of *Norah*, and prefixed to it an introduction in which she represented Ibsen as a champion of Woman's Rights. Women like to form some concrete picture of their friends, and Miss Henrietta Lord was careful to inform her sisters that their defender has a powerful forehead, "a delicate mouth which has no lips, but shuts energetically in a fine line," small blue eyes that almost disappear behind his spectacles, and a

nose quite northern in its irregularity ; that he speaks softly, moves slowly, and rarely gesticulates, and that his "self-command amounts to coldness, but it is the snow which covers a volcano of wild and passionate power." In 1886 Mr. Havelock Ellis published in the Camelot Classics three of Ibsen's plays, *The Pillars of Society*, *Ghosts*, and *An Enemy of the People*, accompanied by a general study in which he passed in review the dramas of the social and psychological series, indicative of a strong sympathy with the new ideas and marked in an extreme degree by a fine literary sense. To this library *Ondine* was added in 1888, and Mr. Gosse returned to the scene to take matters up where he had left them in 1877. Arrived now at the full maturity of his talent, he offered in 1889 an analysis and appreciation of these prose dramas which may be regarded as final in some respects.

It was in the year 1889 that a new period began for Ibsen's fame and influence in England. People were no longer content to read him, they attempted now to put him on the stage. He was tried at afternoon performances, or, as a last resource, as a *fin de saison*, when there was nothing any longer to be lost or gained, in some second-rate theatre which was about to be closed, or which might be said to be only half open ; a little later he was played under the auspices of the Independent Theatre, which is the *Théâtre Libre* of London, but which might be called even more aptly the Nomadic Theatre, for it has no

home of its own, and has to take refuge, like a tramp, in houses that have no habitant. It may be said that from 1889 to 1893 the Ibsenite drama lived in London a thoroughly Bohemian life, never knowing whether it would dine nor where it would sleep on the morrow. Yet there was a good side to this precarious existence, namely, that there was involved in it no thought or care for the question of shillings and pence. Business men have summed up an undertaking or a man when they have said that it or he "does not pay." Now Ibsen has never paid. If I might venture to invert that saying of Irving's which I quoted in a previous chapter, I would affirm that artistic success is most real when business is worst.

Little by little a group of actors and actresses was got together who gave themselves up to the work, and interpreted their author with faith, passion, and courage, ready to "confess" him, and to endure for him, and with him, not death but hisses: I may mention Mr. Waring and Miss Robins, and above all Miss Achurch. An Ibsenite public was coming into existence at the same time, having for its nucleus a small group of those who had been devotees from the first. In addition, there was a great number of hostile critics come to condemn, but behaving themselves on the whole very respectably. Again, there were some who were merely curious, genuinely curious, who brought to these moving representations minds entirely open and unpre-

judiced. These returned in thoughtful mood and exchanged opinions upon the remarkable productions they had witnessed.

It was in the press that the great battles were waged. Many of the critics lost their temper and their manners, and passed, without realising it, from ridicule to mere rudeness. I do not confound these excesses either with the serious discussion to which men of talent submitted Ibsen's philosophy in lectures and in the Reviews, or with merry skits such as those of Mr. Anstey, who gave us a "Pocket Ibsen" in the pages of *Punch*; these parodies suggest, to my mind, a lack neither of comprehension nor of respect. I refer to the furious and savage attacks which seemed to have for object the driving back of Ibsen to Norway, much as the East-End tailors would like to drive back to Hamburg those German immigrants who lower the rate of their wages.

Mr. Archer was the target for the fiercest volleys of these battles, in which he commanded the courageous little phalanx of Ibsenites; but he returned shot for shot, and with usury, for his fire was infinitely more destructive than that of his foes. Just as Mr. Gosse had revealed Ibsen to the literary world fifteen years before, Mr. Archer introduced him now into the world of the theatre.

If he entered into the Ibsen controversy so much later than his colleague, it must not be concluded on this account that he was less well

equipped as regards preliminary study, or that he was upholding convictions that were newly born. To him, also, Ibsen was an early love. So far back as 1873 he knew by heart, in the original, those admirable scenes in *Brand*, which touch the soul to its depths. Before the performance of each new play he would try to explain the Monster, and to get the public into the way of looking it straight in the face; he would translate the symbolism into the most intelligible terms, speaking as one speaks to children, with an authoritative gentleness, a clearness of expression, and wealth of exposition, to which his quick intelligence does not often have resort. But the greatest service he has rendered to the cause, is his series of translations, which are now in everybody's hands; not only do they convey into English the intense realism of Ibsen's dialogues, but young authors may learn from them, also, new flexions of familiar speech, and thus get a step or two nearer to life.

Mr. Archer has been followed, and perhaps outrun, in his apostolate by other writers full of ardour and talent. Amongst these vanguard critics it is impossible not to mention Mr. Arthur B. Walkley, known to the readers of the *Star* as "Spectator," and to those of the *Speaker* by his initials, "A. B. W." To his name must be added that of Mr. George Bernard Shaw, whose articles in the *Saturday Review* have attracted much notice during the year 1895, and have constituted a veritable campaign in Ibsen's honour.

The theatrical managers, as you may suppose, gave Ibsen a wide berth. Mr. Tree was the first of them who ventured to tackle him; this actor possesses an inquiring mind, and a spirit ever ready to accept—even, at need, to initiate—reforms. As long ago as 1891, in a lecture read before the Playgoers' Club, he had given a very clever analysis of one of the most striking of M. Maeterlinck's plays. In 1893 he produced a play of Ibsen's at the Haymarket. The drama which he chose was *The Enemy of the People*. He had supposed, not unreasonably, that the geniality, courage, and invincible optimism of Stockmann would win the public. I imagine he did not regret the experiment, for since then he has made a similar one with a piece of Björnson's. Therein he has set a good example to a greater actor, and in this connection I would venture to ask a question. Is Irving to quit the stage without attempting an Ibsen part? However that may be, the time is approaching when the Norwegian drama will pay. Not, of course, like *Charley's Aunt*! One must not expect too much when one has only genius. Ibsen can and should keep alive without robbing or coveting a single one of lucky Mr. Penley's spectators.

Now that Ibsen is known in England, what influence does he exert, or will he continue to exert in the future, upon English dramatic literature? By what racial affinities was the way for this influence prepared? By what prejudices—religious, philosophical, æsthetic—has it

been impeded? To what does it owe its strength? To the dramatist's art, or to the ideas which inform his work? This is the last big question I have to face before bringing my study to an end.

I do not wish to carry this question on to the moving bog of ethnography; I should lose my life. I shall say only that the English turn towards the Scandinavian world, much as we turn towards the Greco-Latin, with a vague feeling of tenderness and of filial curiosity. If the Teuton is their cousin, the Scandinavian is their brother; if not the eldest of the family, at least the one who has best kept up his tradition. Thus it is to him they have recourse when they would renew or seek inspiration in these traditions. Is it not a significant fact that Mr. Gosse and Mr. Archer, two of the most brilliant minds of their generation, should be familiar at the age of twenty-five with the literary idiom of Denmark and Norway? Is it not curious that the Sagas should have been the common source of Carlyle's last work, and of the most important poem of William Morris? The Sagas are the Commonplace Book, the *livre de raison*, in which this soul of the North, free from all taint of the South, and from all antique serfdom, has left its mark. For the Englishman, who reflects and ponders, it is the real Bible of his race.

Just because the Norseman was the incarnation in the mediæval world of the Teutonic genius in all its purity, a certain number of enthusiasts will not allow his descendants to exist in the present,

and play their part in modern, life. To make of this little country a museum of Runic relics, to make a mere caretaker of this vigorous little race, is worse than pedantry ; it is cruelty. Will it be believed that it was from such a standpoint that objection was first raised against the acceptance of Ibsen ? The idea was so curiously retrograde and artificial, that it could not long hold up against the force of the current. These archæologists, strayed into the field of criticism, made two mistakes : they misunderstood the law which imposes movement and progress upon all living organisms ; and they were unable to recognise in Ibsen, beneath his modern aspect and present-day doubts, that valiant temperament, at once fearless and blunt, of the ancient Vikings,—as brave before the enigmas of thought as *they* had been of yore before the perils of battle and the tempest.

Thus it was that Ibsen, like Oehlenschläger before him and Björnson in his own day, made the Sagas his starting-point. It is in the Sagas that the Norse genius had its root, as in deep and tranquil waters, its stem rising towards the light and flowering above the surface. Even to-day, Norway and Denmark take more pleasure in Ibsen's historical and semi-legendary dramas than in his more recent works ; but whatever they themselves and the devotees of Runic tradition may think, their national character has undergone change since the twelfth century. Many races have contributed to the formation of their character, just as they have to that of the

English, and it is worthy of remark that in both cases the elements are almost identical. The vigorous and energetic Finn, the weak and mystical Laplander, the blue-eyed, fair-haired Norseman, silent and profound, could all find their equivalents, if not their like, amongst the ancestors of the British people. Their history has been different, and yet has had points in common. Like England, Norway has had religious and political individualism for school or rather for model. Absolute independence under a nominal monarchy; freedom of the press and religious intolerance; no nobility and no class distinctions—Norway has been since 1814 very much what England would have been, had the semi-republican establishment of Cromwell and Puritan Democracy endured.

In his strange poem, *Peer Gynt*, Ibsen intended to depict the Norwegian type; and he has done so after a fashion which is the more intelligible to a foreigner in that he has in some cases exaggerated the principal features of this model to the point of caricature. The Norwegian mind is full of wild dreams, which seem to him as real as actual facts. Leading a hard and lonely existence amidst natural surroundings that seem to dwarf and threaten them, the people learn to live in themselves and for themselves. They have much pride and much ambition, and plenty of political wisdom. It is their imagination that sends them into maritime commerce, this being one of the ways left open to the spirit of adventure. *Peer*

Gynt sells idols to the Chinese and Bibles to the missionaries ; this second transaction redeeming the first. Twice he makes his fortune and twice he loses it ; but he is a spirited gambler, and a few oaths suffice to comfort him for his most serious mischances. When, at the moment of his death, he is enabled to rest his head upon the bosom of the woman he has vilely betrayed, he accepts this final stroke of luck like all the rest—grateful but unastonished. The most ludicrous scene of all is that of a death agony ! Peer Gynt's old mother is about to meet her end, and she is seized with violent tremors. Her son, however, reminds her how, when he was a boy, the two of them used to play together at horse and cart. Supposing they had a game now ? Where shall we drive to, mother ? And off they go to where God lives ! They come to the gates and call upon St. Peter for admission,—he's *got* to let Peer Gynt's old mammy into Heaven ! The old woman breaks out into a guffaw, and in the midst of all this frolic, cheered now and brightened up, she achieves the dread crossing. To French readers this scene may seem a ghoulish farce : English humour accepts it from Norwegian humour without demur. In copying from Peer Gynt the portrait of one race, I had it in my mind to paint the portrait of a second. The picture has two models. That is why Ibsen comes so easy to the English mind—less difficult to understand than was Carlyle in his earlier works. The Norwegian cosmopolitan is more

intelligible than the Scottish peasant, Germanized by a too long intimacy with Goethe and Jean Paul.

Everyone knows that Ibsen has his own way of constructing a drama, a way which differs sensibly from ours. Is it better or worse? That is a question with which I am not concerned. What should be noted, however, is that the English, who have proved such wretched pupils in our school, and who, after fifty years have been unable to master their Scribe, have grasped everything they could turn to their own account in Ibsen's methods. To understand this, we must remember that the English have a horror of our realism, even when toned down and filtered through America. Their compatriot, George Moore, despite his incontestable talent, has been unable to get them to accept him. They read his works with curiosity but without pleasure. We have seen in the preceding chapters that of their three most prominent dramatists, two turn their backs resolutely against realism, one by instinct, the other of set purpose; whilst the third cannot acclimatise himself to it, his temperament carrying him off towards the realm of fancy and humour. On this point they are at one with the public. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is an exception. It is a compromise between the dramatic system of *Francillon* and that of *Hedda Gabler*—the second, I think, prevailing. Ibsen has brought to the English the form, the kind, and the degree of realism they can put up with.

Not that they accept everything without demur, even in Ibsen's realism. They draw the line at the brutality of certain details, and the almost childish minuteness of others. Thus it was that Madame Solness's nine dolls produced some tittering in the stalls.¹ In *Little Eyolf*, if Alfred Allmers be allowed to make the avowal in the midst of his despair at the tragic death of his little boy, that he had caught himself wondering what he was going to have for dinner, I should not be surprised if there were, at this point, a shudder of protest. But these moments in which the dramatist and his English spectators are out of sympathy are rare. Shakespeare taught them to be surprised in no way at seeing human nature sink to the lowest depths after rising to giddy heights. What they want is to pass quickly from facts to ideas, and from ideas to fancies, and then to return suddenly to facts. The exact reproduction of life will never seem to them, as at certain literary epochs it has seemed to us, the supreme and final end of Art. It satisfies them only when it leads towards the solution of some problem of conduct, towards the explanation of some enigma

¹ When this episode was reached on the night of the first performance of *The Master Builder*, a critic turned to Mr. Archer and said, "Will you explain *that* symbol to us?" "I am not sure," Mr. Archer replied quietly, "that it *is* a symbol." Upon which, a lady sitting near them interposed: "Excuse my breaking in upon your conversation," she said, "but you may be interested to know that many women are like Mrs. Solness in this. I myself have all the dolls of my childhood safely preserved at home, and I look after them tenderly." It is well known, too, that the Queen's collection of her dolls is preserved at Windsor Castle.

of destiny, or of the fascinating secrets of this psychical world in which we live without ever seeing it,—of what is in it, and beside it, and beyond it. It must not be forgotten that symbolism is not a mere pastime and amusement to the Northern races which are addicted to it, but a real need born of their peculiar nature, a need which is not to be replaced by that idolatry of forms and colours which prevails in the joyous and sensuous South. When it is not satisfied, this need is accentuated to the point of a longing, a craving. The fact translates and suggests, follows or precedes, the thought; without the thought, it were but an empty envelope, a dress without a wearer, a box containing nothing. It serves, so to speak, as handmaid to the idea, and I would venture to suggest this formula (which I believe truthful, though it seem strange): In England, realism will be symbolical or non-existent.

If Ibsen's art, then, is to prove to be to English taste, it is because this art is subordinated to the expression of certain moral feelings, and secret tendencies of the inner life; and also because all the questions with which the dramatist is taken up, are precisely those by which the English race is absorbed and divided into opposing camps; because in fine, Ibsen's message, to make use of the expression of Carlyle, is addressed to this race more than to any other.

With regard to its bearing upon philosophy, let us take for instance that theory of Atavism which

is developed, first of all, in a lugubrious episode in *The Dolls' House*, and which pervades *Ghosts*, and *Rosmersholm*, and *The Lady from the Sea*; does it not find a fit and well-equipped audience in the readers of Darwin, Huxley, and Herbert Spencer? From a social standpoint, the ulcers which Ibsen cauterises are the ulcers which eat also into the life of England. That tyranny of the majority, that conventional and machine-like morality which stifles all initiative, that cavilling, degrading charity which is not Christian, but sectarian, are all well known to England. In Pastor Rörland and Pastor Manders these things find expression,—in the former violent, impetuous, fanatical, in the latter sheeplike and pusillanimous; the one is the incarnation of intolerance, the other of human respect; and England is well aware that she has both her Rörlands and her Manders. When, too, she is shown a Consul Bernick upon the stage, who is full of fine sentiments, but whose fortune is founded upon lies, and who sends out gallant fellows on a ship destined to be wrecked, she must be reminded of her own philanthropic ship-owners, enriched by the insuring of coffin-ships. And just as she is capable of a Bernick, so she is not unequal to producing a Stockmann, nor, in consequence, to understanding and loving this genial *bavard*, this impassioned devotee of truth and virtue, this Don Quixote, this Pangloss who would go to the martyr's stake, but prefers to stop on the road. His enemies have broken his

windows: what does he do? Sends for a glazier! He picks up the stones that have been thrown at him, examines them and criticises them. "Why, these are mere pebbles. There is hardly a decent stone in the lot!" He has returned from a public meeting with his trousers torn, and he comments thus philosophically upon the misadventure: "When you propose to stand up for justice before men, you should be careful not to wear your best pair of breeches." If these traits are not English, I don't know what the English character is.

Were I to pass Ibsen's types in review one by one, I should find it easy to show with what ease they adapt themselves to English life. Engstrand, the man of the people, always a sinner and always lamenting his sin, who makes a career and a livelihood out of his repentance; and Lövborg, that noble but feeble character whom drunkenness drags into debauchery, and in whom the temptations of one night nullify years of virtue and honest endeavour;—these would require no modification or commentary upon the London stage. But it is English women that Ibsen seems to have divined best of all. Nearly all those demands of the Anglo-Saxon woman which evoke so much talk to-day are contained in germ in the last scene of *The Dolls' House*, which dates from 1879. The woman is tired of being a servant and a plaything to the man; she sees herself confronted with responsibilities and duties for which she has had no preparation; she wants to live her own life

as a reasoning and thinking being. This note is being re-echoed daily in the Reviews and on the platforms open to women, and thus Norah's cry is indefinitely prolonged.

It is more than fifteen years since Ibsen wrote : " In democracy will be found the only solution of the social question. But the new state of society should contain an aristocratic element, not the aristocracy of birth or of the money-chest, not even the aristocracy of intellect, but the aristocracy of character, of the will and of the soul. I expect much in this direction from woman and from the working-man, and it will be to the bringing nearer of their hour that my whole life-work shall be devoted." I do not know whether this double promise has been kept. It seems to me that the people have found in him but a wayward and intermittent champion, and women a friend too pitilessly clear-sighted.

Women, both the good and the bad, are given traits of character, in Ibsen's dramas, which are common to the Northern races. That *joie de vivre*, which in Norah gushes forth into affectionate sympathy, but which in Regina (in *Ghosts*) takes the form of a cold and marble-like indifference, which can be touched by nothing save self-interest and self-love ; the jealousy and pride of Hedda Gabler, who prefers to send a man to his death, rather than see him repentant, and brought to happiness through the agency of another woman, and who decides to die herself rather than submit to the yoke or endure the

scorn of the world ; the naïvely animal sensualism of Rita Allmers (in *Little Eyolf*), who puts her husband before her child, and plays the wanton to rekindle the fire which had gone from his heart—to secure the marital attentions which are her due : these are all characteristics which are to be met with beyond the fiftieth parallel and north of the Pas de Calais, no less than north of the Sound.

I shall not go so far as to say that Ibsen has taught the English dramatists to understand the women of their race, but, at least, he has brought out certain aspects of them which had remained unportrayed, whether because the requisite psychological knowledge, or that rare quality, pluck, had been lacking in those who had attempted to depict them. Not all these dramatists accept Ibsen as their master ; Sydney Grundy, whilst disapproving most strongly of the insults with which a certain section of the critics attack Ibsen and his partisans, has declared outright that he himself is no disciple of the author of *The Master Builder*. We can easily believe it ; even without the declaration, his work in itself would have told us as much. Mr. Pinero, also, does not seem to me to have accepted any of Ibsen's ideas ; but he must have reflected upon his methods, and to some purpose, for if the brain which conceived *Hedda Gabler* is a powerful brain, the hand which constructed its various parts, and wove them together, is a cunning hand.

As for Mr. Jones, he indeed has followed both

the artist and thinker in Ibsen. In speaking of his plays, I omitted designedly the adaptation which he made of *A Dolls' House*, in collaboration with Mr. Herman, an Alsatian, resident in London since 1870, who died three years ago. In certain respects the English piece is better constructed than the original, in as much as it rids us of Dr. Rank, who is an excrescence, and of the love-affair of Krogstad and Madame Linden, which is really wanting in common sense. But Mr. Jones, ill advised, I fancy, by a collaborator of rather a timid and commonplace order of mind, shrank from that last scene which may be repellent to some people, but which is really the whole play. For that terrible door which shuts with so inexorable a clang, in the midst of the silence of the night, separating husband and wife perhaps for ever, and leaving Norah to seek her way in the dark and the cold,—symbols of a life of which nothing is known, save that hardships will be met in it,—the authors of *Breaking a Butterfly* substituted a general reconciliation. They justified the optimistic *dénouement* by making the husband rise to that act of heroic devotion, which, in the original, Norah declares she hoped for from him. Ibsen did not intend this, and he was right. It is necessary that Norah should look for this sacrifice, and that she should look in vain. Thus the man and the woman maintain their individual characters : the one remains faithful to his practical logic, the other to her romantic conception of life ; and if everything does not turn out well, at least

everything is true in this most disunited of *ménages*.

Mr. Jones has been much happier when inspired by Ibsen than when he has translated him. It is, above all, when he is depicting women that he seems to me to be haunted by the memory of the Norwegian's heroines. It may be said, speaking generally, that a breath of Ibsen has passed through all his works during the last seven or eight years. But his dialogue is too lively, he yields too much to the temptation of turning his wit to account, he is of too gay a temperament, to be a veritable Ibsenite. It is in these respects, indeed, that the divergence begins between the author of *Hedda Gabler* and his admirers on the other side of the Channel. The English are ready to rail at life, but not to condemn it root and branch; despite an apparent sombreness they know how to enjoy themselves, and they consent to travel only as tourists in that world of Ibsen's, in which for the few smiling and sunlit spaces, there frown such vast and mournful solitudes, where nothing sings and nothing flowers.

It has been said that Ibsen is the Winter of the North and Björnson its Spring. This Björnson is a strange personality. Intellect and temperament have made a battlefield of his life. Born to write idylls, he has thrown himself heart and soul into the warfare of journalism. He has come under, and even sought, a thousand influences, instead of trying to find himself. The friendly antagonism with Ibsen has done him more harm

than good. This connection has made him known to readers in Western Europe, but it has drawn him into channels for which his faculties did not fit him, and have failed to support him. By his faith in the future, and by his confident and combative spirit, he seemed destined to please the English. Long before Ibsen's name had been even mentioned in London, his *Arne* and *Synnové Solbakken* had been read there, two sketches of peasant life which will bear comparison with *La Mare au Diable* and *La Petite Fadette*; and the idealist novels he has published during the last ten years became popular with his countrymen only after they had first achieved success in England. But his plays up to the present have made but little show upon the English stage, and he shares only to an infinitesimal degree in the sympathies and antipathies of his illustrious rival.

When Ibsen attacks that class of puritans and hypocrites who turn away their faces when they pass the entrance to a theatre, there is no hesitation about applauding him and imitating him. But when he would shake the whole edifice of society, and when he calls in question all the ideas and customs upon which the edifice is based, the theatre hesitates to follow him, for it feels that a portion of its clientèle, and that the best,—that which has always been constant in its support,—will be startled and alarmed. The theatre is reactionary, and has good reason to be: it is to its commercial interest to range itself alongside privilege and tradition, against change and

progress. It is on the side of those who have money in their pockets, and who wish to amuse themselves, for these are the people to whom it opens its doors. These people are indignant when, having come to weep or to laugh, they are made to think; when a man to whom they cannot but listen speaks to them of their rights and their duties, of life and of death, of their most secret thoughts, of what they would fain ignore or forget, and all this with a freedom, an air of authority, a depth the theatre had never known before, the pulpit knows no longer. Here is the key to the exclamations of surprise, the gusts of anger, the broadsides of satire and ridicule, which Ibsen and his devotees have had to face. But one gets used to everything, even to being insulted, and gets even to like it. It is one of the amusements of the decadent. Perhaps some day we shall see Ibsen's adversaries, fascinated by his genius, follow his barque like the rats that followed the ratwife's in *Little Eyolf*, and plunge into the deep waters to the music of his flute.¹

¹ I should have wished to determine the influence exerted by the contemporary German drama upon the dramatic movement in England, but I can find no trace of any such influence at all. Only a single work of Sudermann's has so far been translated, and this came from America. An attempt was made in 1895 to found a permanent *Deutsches Theater* in London, and works by Freytag, Sudermann, Hauptmann, Otto Hartleber, Max Halbe, and Blumenthal were produced there. I do not know whether the attempt, made under modest, and indeed almost mean, conditions, will be renewed. The critics attended the performance, but the general public paid but little attention to them.

CHAPTER XIII

G. R. Sims—R. C. Carton—Haddon Chambers—The Independent Theatre and Matinée Performances—The Drama of To-morrow—A “Report of Progress”—The Public and the Actors—Actor-Managers—The Forces that have given Birth to the Contemporary English Drama — Disappearance of the Obstacles to its becoming Modern and National—Conclusion.

I HAVE given an account of the beginnings of the contemporary dramatic movement, have indicated the various influences from within and from without which have affected it, by which it has been stimulated or held back ; have analysed what seem to me the most characteristic of those dramas which have already seen the light. There remains nothing then for me to do, except to ascend a tower, as it were, and to scan the horizon, and to foretell, if I can do so, what we may expect from the drama of to-morrow.

There is a group of writers who keep near the confines of drama and melodrama, torn between literary ambition and the very natural wish to earn money. What will they do? Will they be artists or artizans? Will they stoop to the conditions of the trade, or rise to the requirements of the art? There are many of their kind

whom Sir Augustus Harris has made away with, and whom we shall never get back.

I can remember the hopes given rise to by Mr. Buchanan. But, as Oronte says in Molière's *Misanthrope*—" *Belle Philis, on désespère alors qu'on espère toujours.*" The case of Mr. G. R. Sims is different. There has been no apostasy with him; he has remained what he always was, and has given what he was bound to give. Story-teller, journalist, or playwright, he is an improviser, who does not aim too high, but who combines with a gift of observation, a certain imaginative faculty and a kind of popular humour, together with a touch of Zolaism. Above all, he is a Cockney, and nothing that belongs to Cockneydom is unknown to him. The only play of the period in which you can really smell the East End, as the *maître* of Medan would say, is *The Lights o' London*, and that perhaps is why all the London managers, one after the other, returned it to Mr. Sims, "with thanks." *The Lights o' London* got produced in the end, however, and had an immense success, but a success that was not to endure. It is not towards realism, as we have seen, that the English stage is making.

Who will take the lead amongst the younger school of dramatists? Who will write the *Judahs*, *The Second Mrs. Tanquerays* of tomorrow? Will it be Mr. Louis N. Parker, Mr. Malcolm Watson, or Mr. J. M. Barrie? Or will it be Mr. Carton, author of *Liberty Hall* (one of

the successes of 1893) and of *The Squire of Dames*, an adaptation, or rather an abridged translation, of *L'Ami des femmes*, which has been attracting the public to the Criterion? Up to the present, Mr. Carton has shown that he possesses wit and talent, but neither observation nor the inventive faculty. But in the near future he may give proof of both.

Or will it be Mr Haddon Chambers, who is already known in Paris, one of his works, *The Fatal Card*, having crossed the channel? Since then he has written a piece entitled *John-a-Dreams*, played at the Haymarket in 1894, in which Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Mr. Tree joined their talents. It is not a good play, but it is one in which the tendencies of the new drama are clearly shown. I recall one scene of the utmost simplicity, the restrained and sober emotion of which contrasts curiously with the fine phrases a situation such as it contains would inspire in an author of a quarter of a century ago. Kate Cloud loves, and is loved by, Harold Wynn. Before consenting to marry him she gets herself introduced to Harold's father, a country clergyman.

"You do not know me, sir," she says to him (I quote from memory), "but I know you. You came to preach ten years ago at the village of ——. I was with Mrs. Withers then."

"Oh, indeed,—an excellent person," he replies; "but it is strange that I did not make your acquaintance."

"No, it is not strange, really,—do you remember the kind of work she was engaged upon?"

"The redemption of unfortunates, was it not?"

"Yes, exactly. And you, doubtless—you helped her?"

"No," Kate replies gravely, sadly, her voice trembling. "No, it was she who helped me." She tells him her story, the sad, perennial story, or rather, having begun it, she leaves him to divine the rest. "They came to my help," she goes on, "but no one came to the help of my mother. She fed and clothed me when I was little; I in my turn fed and clothed her later on."

Then had come years of endeavour, and the hard apprenticeship by which she had made herself an honest woman.

"Now, sir, if a man who had a heart wanted to marry me in full consciousness of my past, should I have the right to accept him?"

"Certainly, my child," the old man answers.

"You would still be of the same opinion even though the man were of your own rank, . . . were a friend of yours, . . . were your son?"

Harold's father gives a gesture of anguish and horror, of physical recoil and inexpressible confusion. Then he stammers, tries to recover himself, seeks to call to his aid the merciful doctrine of the sacred Book which he has all his life upon his lips, and which he thought he had within his heart. But Kate does not give him time. A gesture has decided her future; she holds herself bound by this instinctive display of a social preju-

dice which has become his second nature, his second conscience, even to the point of effacing the idea of pardon in him who should be its interpreter and messenger. The title of the play is not misleading, the action being pervaded and, as it were, impregnated by, steeped in, dreaminess. Mr. Haddon Chambers dares to dream in the theatre, and the public seem to me to be ready to keep him company. That anyone should go to the theatre to dream will seem incredible to many Parisians. But we must remember always that the English mind has literary needs, and to a certain point emotional propensities, that are different from ours. We should have in our minds, too, in the place of these theatres of ours so brightly lit, in which the spectacle lies often as much in the boxes and balcony as on the stage, those London theatres, plunged in a semi-obscurity which induces to forgetfulness of oneself and of the ordinary conditions of life. The stage appears like the fabric of a vision. The dull-looking, uninterested faces of the musicians are no longer interposed between us and the scenery. The jingling of a bracelet, a slight rustling of satin, the faint and delicate odour of a rose, the quick breathing of some neighbour who is moved, bring home to us only at moments the presence of other human beings. Perhaps it is the place of all others where one gets furthest away from the thought of reality, where one is readiest to wish for the unlikeliest and to love the impossible.

After the writers whom I have named, there are others, and yet others still, whose names the public hardly knows, and at whose manuscripts the managers look askance. The Independent Theatre gave them an opening, but this theatre itself has ceased its existence, beset with difficulties, and there is nothing to suggest that it will come to life again. There remain for them only those matinées in the regular theatres which lend their stage, more or less disinterestedly, for these ephemeral performances in which young actors are to be found interpreting unknown authors to the strangest of publics. The house is full of friends—if it be not empty altogether. A certain number of long-suffering play-lovers attend these tentative representations, sustained by the hope of being the first to discover a talent in process of formation, or a new formula of art: they have come across little up to the present except the *gaucherie* which feels its way, and the deliberate exaggeration which aims at exciting wonder.

Those who have followed me in this long study of mine, and who have watched the evolution of the English drama through its successive stages, are in a position to see for themselves what advance it has made already during the last thirty years. There is the advance first of all in the taste of the public. The democracy has gone through its course of education; it has “settled,” so to speak, and the dregs have sunk to the bottom. Three classes of spectators have gradu-

ally been formed by a process of natural selection. The music halls provide for the feasting of the eye; melodrama and farce have attracted and retain an enormous mass of clients; the literary drama and Comedy have secured their own homes, to which one looks only for artistic emotions and refined amusements.

In these are to be found that highest rank of actors and actresses whose rise in fortune, talent, and esteem I have described. To the names already mentioned I would add those of some to whom I have not had occasion to refer in these pages, but whom I have often had the pleasure of applauding: Mr. Willard, Mr. Wilson Barrett, and Mr. Forbes Robertson; Mr. Charles Wyndham, whose confident and brilliant style would do honour to the best of our *sociétaires* of the Rue Richelieu; Mr. Robson, whose gift of humorous naturalness almost made a realistic play out of *Liberty Hall*; Lionel Brough, who for thirty years has set the stamp of his whimsical originality upon all his rôles; Miss Evelyn Millard, who recalls Mrs. Patrick Campbell without imitating her; and Miss Kate Rorke, who is, on the contrary, her exact opposite, and who incarnates the sweet freshness of pure affection, the innocence which weeps and smiles, just as Mrs. Campbell personifies the love that is disquieting and dangerous; Miss Winifred Emery, an actress of varied and supple talent, capable of depicting caprice no less than virtue and devotion. The list is far from being complete.

There have always been a number of good actors, but what was constantly lacking before the Bancrofts' time was unison. To-day the *ensembles* are far better than they were, and they would be better still were it not for that perpetual *va-et-vient* in the theatrical world which is so injurious to the homogeneity of the various companies.

The art of *mise-en-scène* did not exist. To-day it not merely exists: it has reached a certain degree of perfection. I am not referring now to the scenic splendours and illusions of Drury Lane, though I have no wish to make light of these, but to that appropriate framing, that scrupulous accuracy in the matter of historical details, no less than in the matter of modern accessories, that living atmosphere, to use Irving's formula, with which the intelligent stage-manager should clothe the action of the piece. I have already alluded to the Shakspearian revivals at the Lyceum. No one knows better than Mr. Tree, of the Haymarket, how to give us a glimpse of the real world of fashion, and how to bring home to us the poetry underlying the play which he is producing. Mr. Haddon Chambers must have been grateful to him for that yacht which sped so swiftly past the Needles, bathed in the pale radiance of the moon; and for the scenery in the last act which imparted a sense of austere and solemn grandeur to the conclusion of the play. In the same piece, when Harold, after a sleepless night, threw open his window, and we saw the

fields lying under their covering of morning mist, and the fresh and joyous sunlight flooded the room, and there came to our ears the song of the awakening birds, the sensation was full of a rare charm, serving as *andante* to the loftiest feelings.

It would seem that the dramatists have not so much influence in the matter of *mise-en-scène* as they might wish. But may this not be that for one reason or another their competency, except in the case of some of them, is inferior to their pretensions? It is the custom to abuse the actor-managers, and to point to them as one of the obstacles to the complete development of the drama. It is a domestic quarrel, and there is no good in interfering between husband and wife. It is possible that some actor-managers succumb to the temptation of ordering their parts to measure, and call for even more docility than talent from the young authors whom they employ. It is possible also that the ill-feeling of a dramatist who has had his work refused, or of an actor who has been left in the background, may have done something to exaggerate the evil. Make a study of the author-manager who has to minister to his own personal vanity, to his own literary prepossessions, and to the needs of his own special circle of admirers and sympathisers; the commercially-minded manager for whom questions of art find their answer in the yearly balance-sheet; the worldly, pleasure-seeking manager, *amateur de théâtre* and to an even greater degree *amateur de femmes*: you will find

that each has his faults, and that these faults are just as bad on the whole as the actor-manager's.

Another obstacle is the Censorship. I have shown how absurd it is in principle; it is my duty to add that in practice it is not wholly unreasonable, though it relapses into prudishness every now and then. I have read lately a moving drama, from the pen of Mr. William Heinemann, the celebrated publisher whose enterprising spirit is well known in the world of literature, and who has it in him to make no less a mark in the world of the theatre. The Censorship would not sanction *The First Step*: this piece might have made it known to Londoners that there are couples in their great city whom the registrar has not united and whom the clergyman has not blessed, men of good position who get drunk and beat their mistresses, young girls who leave home in the morning and don't return at night. The Censorship thought it better to spare them this revelation.

But such instances are rare. The Censorship is changing bit by bit, like the beefeaters of the Tower, who replaced their hose by breeches some years ago without warning. These breeches do not go, I am aware, with the hood, doublet, and halbert, but this is our poor way of imitating nature in her transformations. For the Censorship there is only one way of adapting itself to modern life, and that is to disappear. Disappear it will, but slowly and gradually, confining its action to essential cases; and thus it will drag

out its existence yet a little while. When, finally, the time will come to give it its *coup-de-grâce*, it will be found to have already ceased to breathe.

Who then will succeed to the censor? who will be censor when the Censorship has been abolished? The public itself; the public represented not only by those of its members who are the most refined, but those who are strictest and most uncompromising. In other words, the Puritans will be on the watch. And after all, why not? Are they not one of the forces of the national mind, one of the reasons of England's existence? They are the natural enemies of the theatre, and will last as long as it. When they leave it free, their end or its end will be near at hand, and England's end will be in sight.

We live, not because we choose but because we must. It is thus with the English drama as with everything else. The law that put the dramatic work of foreigners upon the same footing in regard to copyright as their own has made translation and adaptation almost impossible, by reason of the double expense involved. Thenceforward it was necessary for the English dramatist to invent plots for himself, to be original, to be himself. It was thus the English drama came to life.

The vote of Congress, which in 1890 secured copyright in America for English authors, put an end to the old system of keeping plays in manuscript. Once publication was no longer attended by risk, how could they hold aloof from

this new form of success? Accordingly they began to print. But in order to be read, a play should be really written. The drama, then, had to become literary. As yet it is literary only in a moderate degree. I began with the question: Is there a living English drama at the present moment? To be living it is necessary that it should express the ideas and the passions of the time, and to be English it should be a faithful likeness, a complete synthesis of all the elements of the national character. The drama, from various causes, *was* behind the times. These causes, which I have pointed out and discussed, were:—

1. The timidity resulting from excessive severity of manners.

2. The dramatist's lack of opportunity for the study of social life.

3. The Shakespeare cult, which paralysed the imagination by offering it a model that was too big for it, and forms that had become antiquated.

These causes have disappeared one after the other. The moral ideal has become enlarged and has given over a wider field to the dramatist. The dramatist himself has learned to know life outside the green-room and the tavern back-parlour. He has studied from nature instead of copying Goldsmith and Sheridan. Shakespeare has never been less imitated, perhaps because he has never been better acted or better understood.

But what prevented the drama from being "English"? It is we French who have prevented it—it is from our drama that the English

playwrights have drawn for so long, at first with an indiscriminate eagerness for which there is no parallel, later more modestly and with discernment. At the risk of offending my compatriots, I must here express my absolute conviction that, except in regard to acting, this French influence has been harmful to the English stage. Our dramatists have enriched some London managers ; but they have lain for thirty years on top of the English dramatists, and have stifled their originality—and without deriving much profit from this involuntary tyranny. If only they could have taught their pupils the secrets of their trade ! But the English were maladroit disciples of Scribe and Sardou, whilst the philosophy of Dumas and Augier remained to them a closed book.

The French influence has come at last to be what it should be. The two theatres, placed upon the same footing, will lend each other from time to time,—now, the idea of a play which, treated differently on either side of the channel, will serve to measure the divergence or resemblance of the two forms of society ; now, a complete play which, translated literally, will give to us a perfect representation of London life, or to the Londoners a perfect representation of ours. Meanwhile the English drama, freed from its leading strings, will find its own way for itself. It is capable of doing so unaided, but I think Ibsen's plays will help it. In this reference to Ibsen my readers may think they see a contradiction in my reasoning. "What !" they will

cry. "In order to bring back the English drama to itself again, you say it must be freed from foreign influence, and yet you send it to school to Norway!"

But I have answered this objection by anticipation. I have shown that Ibsen is not a foreigner to England. He seems to have written for Englishmen; he has given them the kind of drama, more or less, that Shakespeare, were he living now, would have given them. I write this sentence, confident that if I am in the world, or, not being in the world, am still read, a score of years hence, no one will be inclined to call me to account for it. To the Northern races, at all events, Ibsen means not a fashion but an era.

What the English drama is in search of, what it is about to create,—with or without Ibsen's assistance,—is a new form in which to reproduce that dualism which has struck and disconcerted every observer, native or foreign, Matthew Arnold, Emerson, Taine. For my part, I have sometimes endeavoured to trace this dualism to the marriage, tempestuous but fruitful, of Saxon and Celt, to the effort, ever vain but never ceasing, of these two refractory elements to fuse and unite. The drama of the sixteenth century came, in a moving and memorable hour, from one of those unions between the young and strong in which there enters something of violence and even of madness. The existing drama is the issue of parents well on in years in a time of gloom and trouble. It is

delicate and calls for care. At the same time, it bears resemblances to those who gave it life. A race of heroes who are also buccaneers, a race of poets and shopkeepers, a race fearless of death and devoted to money, calculating but passionate, dreamers yet men of action, capable of the charges of Balaclava and the deal in the Suez shares, cannot possibly find its literary expression either in pure idealism or in realism undiluted. The "bleeding slice of life" awakes in it no appetite; "Art for Art's sake" leaves it wonderfully indifferent; of moralising, it is tired for the time being: it is passing through a stage of sensuous torpor which is not without charm, and it waits open-eyed and, as it were, hesitatingly before the labour of creating society afresh, of building up a new civilisation. It does not wish, and is not able, to forget those problems—that terrible To-morrow—by which we are everywhere threatened. Hence its sensuousness is tempered, refined, saddened by philosophy. And in this mood, what it asks of the drama is not to be amused, or to be excited, but to be made to think.

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